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THROUGH THE HEXI CORRIDOR • DENG XIAOPING'S HOMETOWN
QIANG — AN ANCIENT PEOPLE

**202**

ISSN 1025-577X



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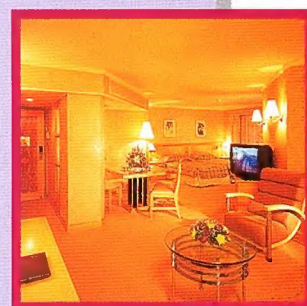
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A Journey Through the Hexi Corridor

Photos & Article by Xie Guanghui

When Emperor Wudi of the Han Dynasty decided to reclaim the border area known as Hexi Corridor on the west bank of the Yellow River, he could never have imagined that 2,000 years after his death this piece of land would come to represent the rich historical legacy of the time. Its landscape and unique folk customs have transformed the area into an ideal tourist destination.

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NATURE

Mt. Ma'an – a Natural Botanical Garden

Photos & Article by Li Tianshe

Many rare plants are found in Mount Ma'an in the Greater Liangshan Mountains in Sichuan. Going through the primeval forests, one seems to be visiting a kingdom of plants. Many of the flowers are not only unusually beautiful but are also precious rare herbs.

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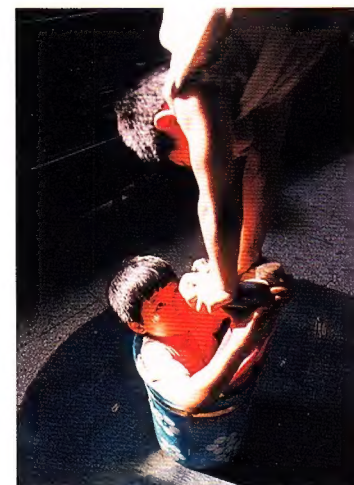
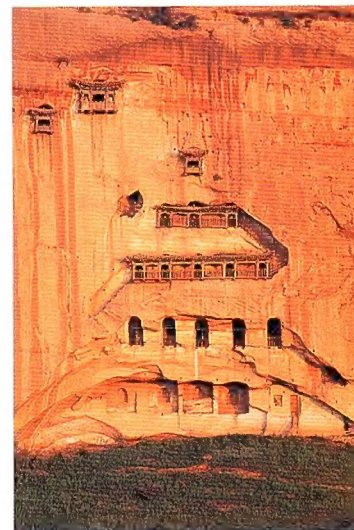
People who love to watch acrobatics may not know much of the sweetness and bitterness of the acrobats' life. Our correspondent lives with the students for 12 days where they are constantly reminded that one minute on stage requires 10 years of training. Discover the inside story of a town of acrobats in Liaocheng, Shandong Province.

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FROM THE EDITOR

For One Minute of Excellence

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C O N T E N T S

No. 202 May, 1997

CHALLENGES

Eighty Days Around the Sacred Yamzho Yum Lake

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Photos & Article by Huang Yanhong

Joining a scientific field study team, our reporter had to endure all kinds of hardship in order to explore the geological and meteorological conditions of the area, but he also learned a lot about the history and legends of the lake.

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We learn about student life at the famous Sêrtar Buddhist institute.

PEOPLE

The Qiang People

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Photos by Ge Jialin & Zhang Jinneng

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The Qiangs are one of China's ancient ethnic groups. With a population of 100,000, they mostly live in Sichuan Province.

CITY PROFILE

Harbin – a Charming City by the Songhua River 68

Photos by Xie Guanghui Article by Winston Yau

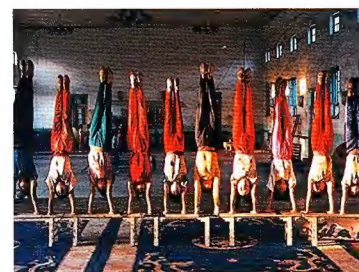
An important industrial base in the Northeast, Harbin has a special charm owing to its unique landscape and a rich blend of Eastern and Western cultures.

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Front Cover: The acrobats of Liaocheng





PHOTOGRAPHY

NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS IN A QIANG VILLAGE

by Yuan Rongsun

Many people would choose a slow shutter speed when taking photos set in a night-time background based on the fact that a longer time is needed to sensitise the film and, at the same time, the slow shutter speed can create some very special effects.

However, it is not easy to get a beautiful picture under these conditions, even for an experienced photographer who often takes

as many frames as possible of the same scene so as to guarantee a higher chance of success. We do not know how many shots the photographer took in order to produce this picture, but we do know it is a very successful one.

The photo captures a restrained contrast between tranquillity and activity, blurring and sharpness, thus enhancing its expressiveness.

Estimated data: 135 camera, 28 mm lens; Kodak slide E100s; shutter = 2 seconds; aperture = 5.6.

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FOR ONE MINUTE OF EXCELLENCE

People who enjoy watching the breath-taking stunts performed by acrobats often wonder "What is life really like behind stage?"

The first message we received from our special reporter Li Nan who was on an assignment at the acrobatic school in Liaocheng, Shandong, may give a clue to the answer of that question: "The hectic training begins at 5:30 in the morning.... To these kids aged between six and 15 years, becoming an acrobat is a dream, an honour and a synonym of great success. They pay a painful price to realise their dream, doing the splits with tears in their eyes and holding a handstand for a dozen or more minutes. Yet they continue to practise day after day, year after year. The one thing that inspires them are the words they repeatedly hear from their teachers, "One minute on stage requires 10 years of practice." To tell the truth, we were amazed when we read these words. Who would ever have imagined that a one-minute act would require such preparation and dedication!

Drawing our thoughts back to our magazine, we realised it is a general truth that one needs to work doubly hard to reach one's goal. In order to make every issue of China Tourism attractive, we have to carry out in-depth interviews and work hard on producing beautiful designs. This, we believe, is exactly what our readers expect from us.

One minute in the limelight requires 10 years of practice. Let's all keep that in mind.

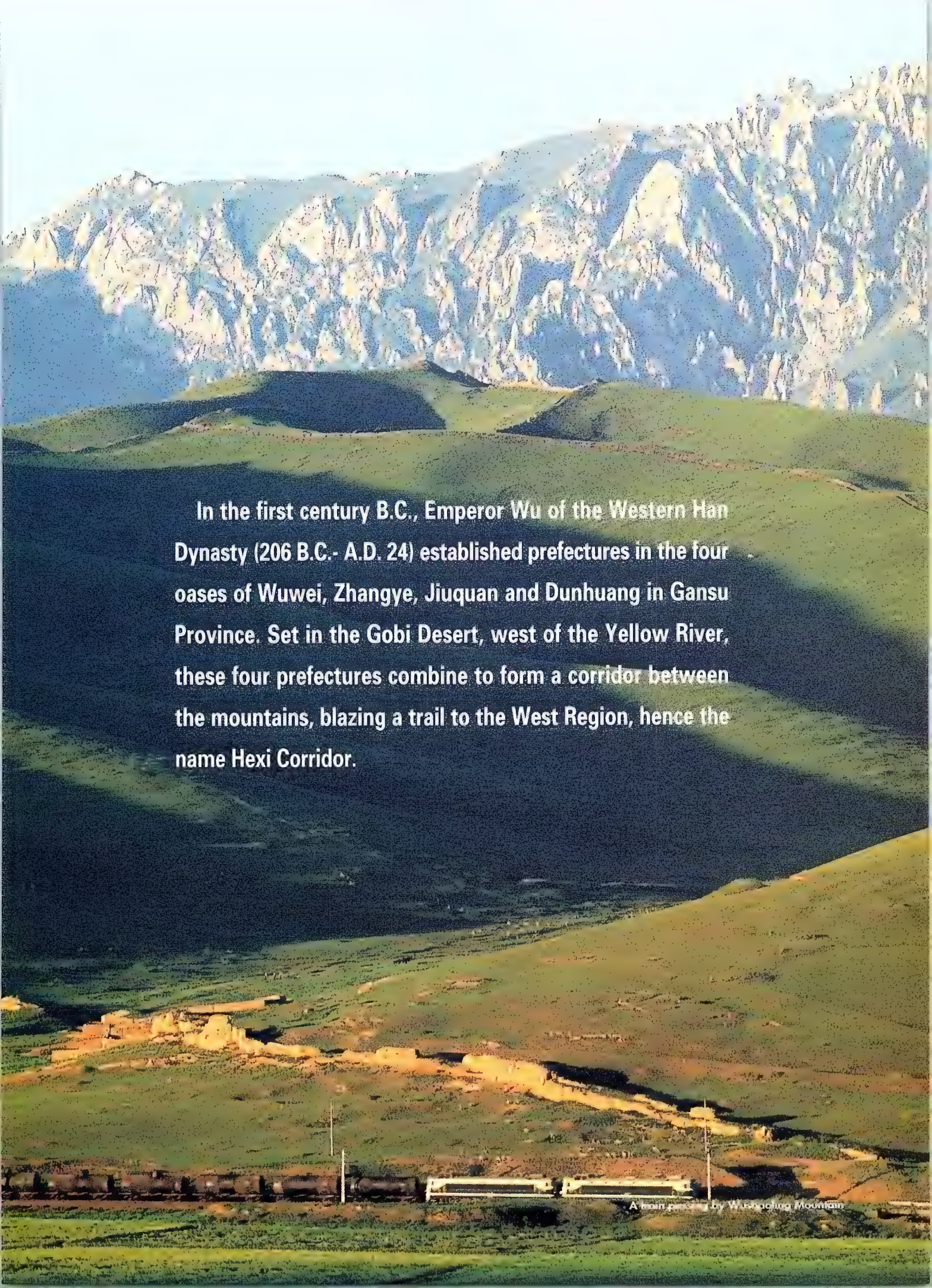
Photo by Xie Guanghui



HIGHLIGHT

A Journey Through the Hexi Corridor

Article & Photos by Xie Guanghui



In the first century B.C., Emperor Wu of the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.- A.D. 24) established prefectures in the four oases of Wuwei, Zhangye, Jiuquan and Dunhuang in Gansu Province. Set in the Gobi Desert, west of the Yellow River, these four prefectures combine to form a corridor between the mountains, blazing a trail to the West Region, hence the name Hexi Corridor.

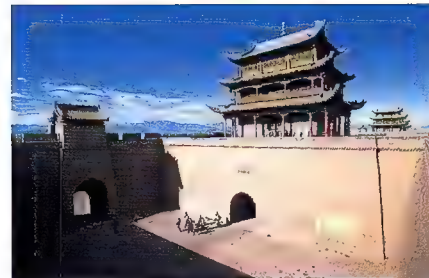
A train passing by Wushengling Mountain



The yulin Grottoes, also known as Ten-Thousand-Buddha Gully, are situated 76 kilometres to the south of Anxi County. The 41 grottoes are arranged on sandstone cliffs on the east and west banks of the Yulin River valley. Housed in these grottoes are frescos and painted sculptures attributed to the Sui, Tang, Song and Western Xia dynasties. Also of superb artistic value, the Yulin grottoes are known as "sister grottoes" of Mogao.



Most ethnic Yugur people are descendants of Mongols and the ancient Ouigour people. Today, they mostly live in the Zhangye area. Not having their own language, the Yugurs generally speak Han Chinese. Due to the influence of the Mongols, the Yugurs living in the east mostly speak the Engel language, while those living in the west speak the Raohur language.



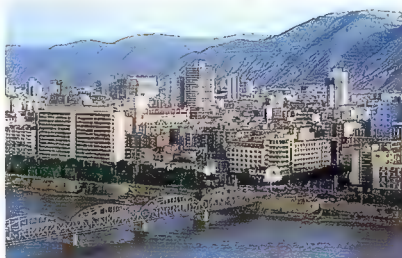
Jiayuguan Pass, the western terminus of the Ming-dynasty Great Wall, is the most magnificent and best preserved fortification of the entire Great Wall. Built in 1372, the trapezoid-shaped structure consists of inner and outer battlements and a barbican entrance. Jiayuguan Pass is strategically located between the Qilian Mountains in the south and the Heishan Mountain in the north.



The Ming-dynasty Great Wall, which takes a south-eastern tack through the Zhangye area, was built on the ruins of a wall built during the Han Dynasty. Therefore, some of the beacon towers and battlements on the wall actually belong to the Han Dynasty. A section of the wall runs parallel to the Lanzhou-Urümqi Highway.



The ancient city of Wuwei was first built by the Huns. During the Sui Dynasty the city wall gradually disappeared, leaving only a few sections in ruins. Remaining ancient structures include the Confucius Temple, the Bell Tower, the pagoda of the Luoshi Temple, the Leitai Terrace and the Haizang Temple.



Lanzhou, capital of Gansu Province, is situated on the Loess Plateau. The upper section of the Yellow River flows straight through its city proper.

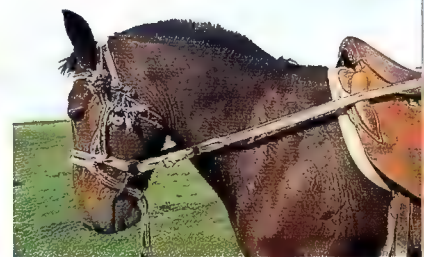


Jiuquan was once an important settlement on the Silk Road. Not much of the ancient city remains today after repeated reconstruction in history. The old city wall and gate tower have long since disappeared, saving for the ruins of a 200-metre section in the south-west corner and the south gate of what is known as Fulu (Happiness and Fortune) City.

省

圖例 Legend

- 古蹟、名勝 Historical site
- 市、縣 City or county
- 省會 Provincial capital
- 漢長城 Han-dynasty Great Wall
- 明長城 Ming-dynasty Great Wall
- 鐵路 Railway
- 公路 Highway



The Army Horse Ranch in Shandan County on the Damayun Grassland is reputedly Asia's leading horse ranch. The ranch looks its seasonal best during July and August, when herds of these magnificent horses can be seen grazing or galloping over the vast meadows.

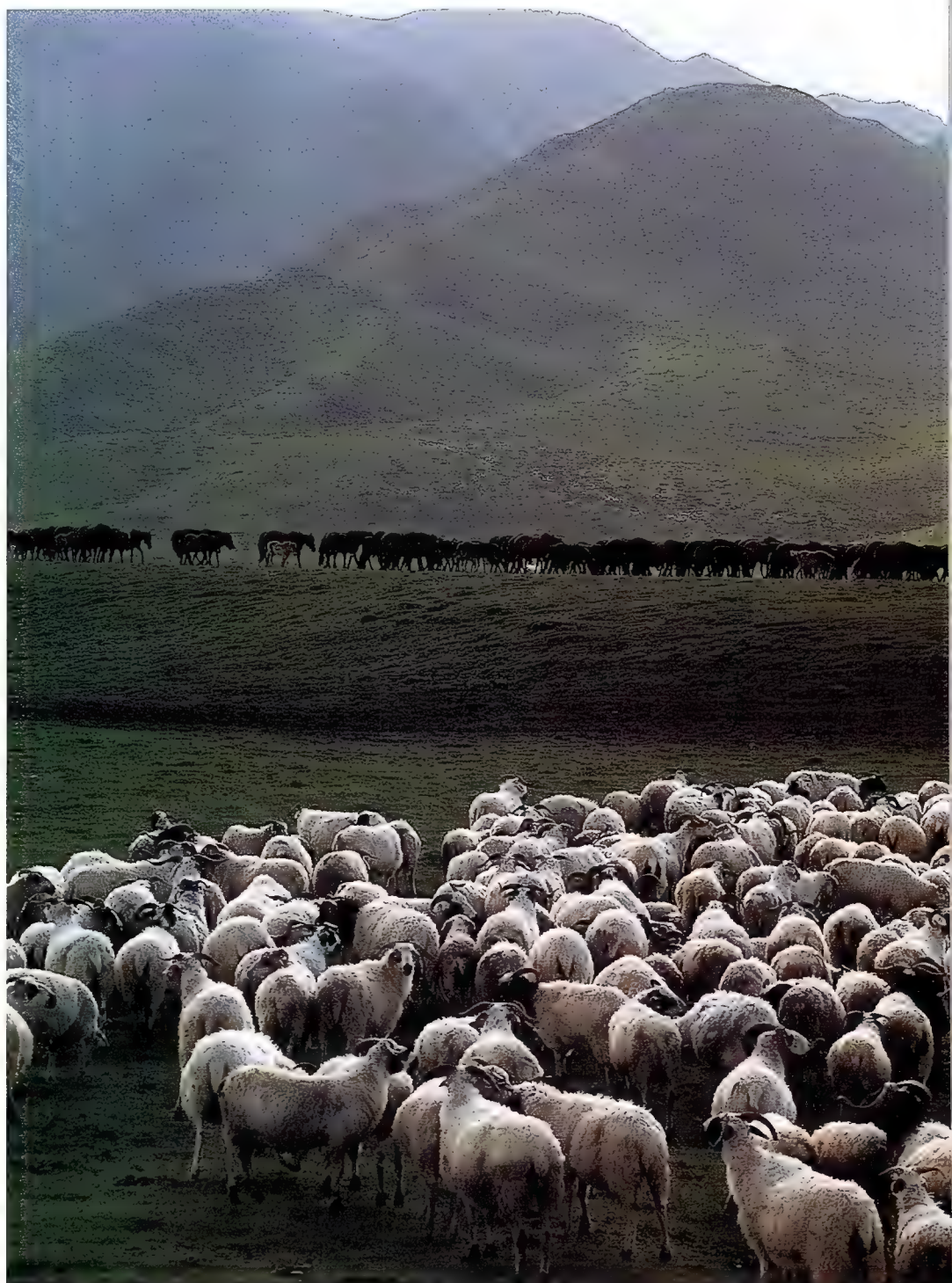
Wushaoling Mountain

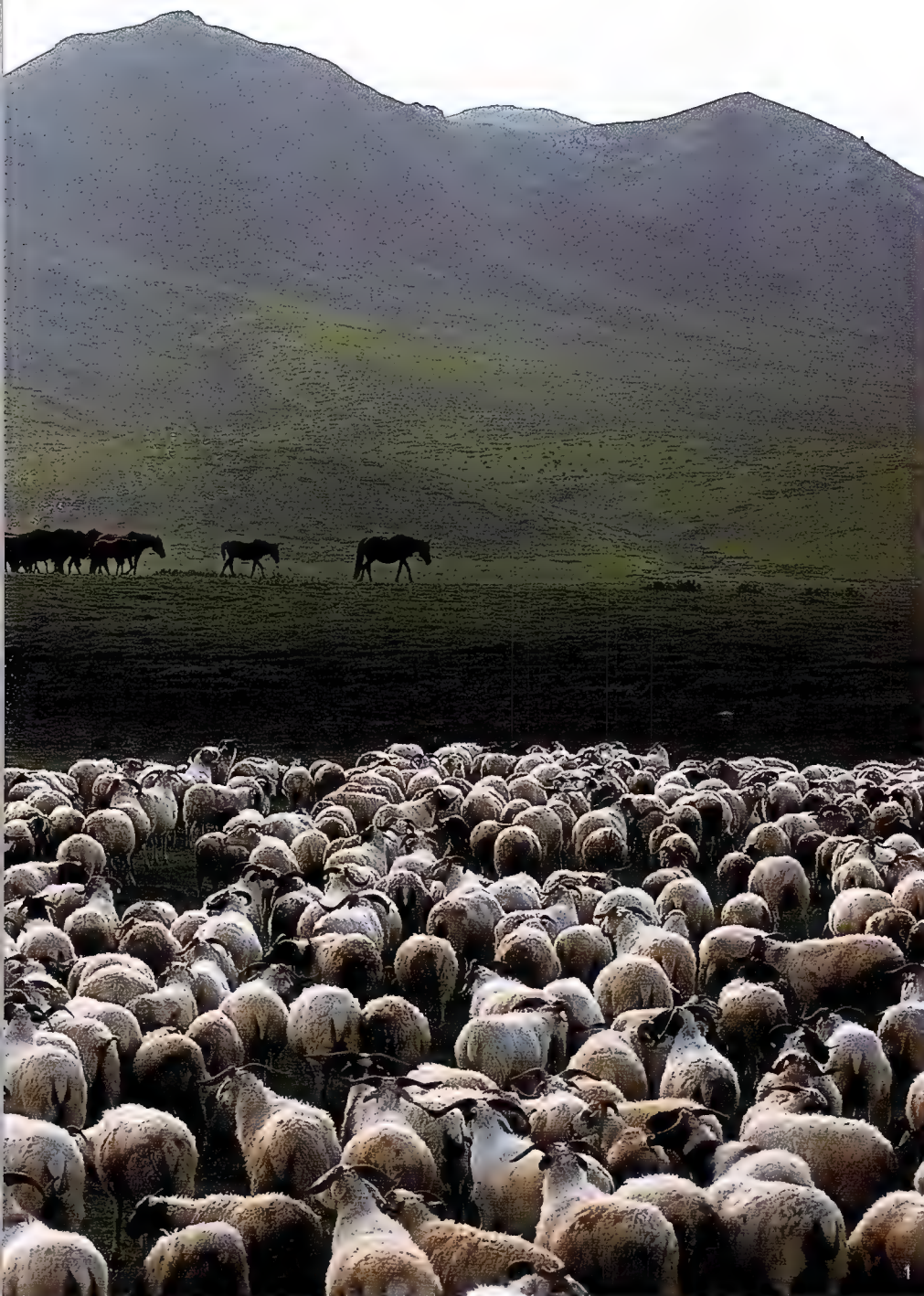
Our journey through this corridor began in Lanzhou from where we crossed the Yellow River and then sped north-west along the Lanzhou-Urümqi Highway. Once we had driven past Tianzhu County the road began to spiral up into the hills of the Wushaoling Mountain.

One of the major peaks in the Qilian Mountains, snow-capped Wushaoling rises up majestically from an immense tapestry of downy grassland. In the distance we could see vestiges of the Han-dynasty Great Wall rolling into sight from the south-eastern corner like a formidable dragon coiling in an ocean of clouds. Looking over our shoulder we could see automobiles crawling up along the twisting path like a few cautious beetles. Because of the perilous terrain even westbound trains on the Lanzhou-Urümqi Railway have to reduce their speed.

Anmen (Safe Gate) Village, strategically situated on the Jinqiang River below the mountain, forms the eastern gateway to the Hexi Corridor. In bygone days no one could enter the corridor without submitting their credentials to inspectors stationed in the village, not even diplomatic envoys.

Upon arriving in the town of Wuwei, we first paid a quick visit to the Confucius Temple where a Western Xia stone tablet is erected and then to Leitai where there is a bronze sculpture of a galloping horse. We continued our journey and managed to reach the Great Wall township before sunset. Under the setting sun the Great Wall looked pitiful, defaced by years of corrosive winds and drifting sands, it looked like the skeleton of a spine as it stretched northwards out of the town. The former beacon towers have long since crumbled into a pile of sand and rubble. Nearby, an unknown river, beginning life in the snowy mountains, finally dies here drying up long before it is able to empty itself into the ocean. However, the little





1. The Shandan Army Horse Ranch is also ideal for grazing sheep.
2. The Shandan Army Horse Ranch, known as Asia's No.1 horse ranch.
3. This fine steed, about to break into a gallop, brings to mind many Western movies.

shape by digging a deep ditch at its foot.

Having taken a quick lunch in the county seat of Shandan, we hopped into a rented jeep and headed for an army horse ranch located on the 2,000-square-kilometre Damayun Pasture, hemmed in by the Yanzhi and Qilian mountains. We arrived at the headquarters of the army horse ranch in Wangjiazhuang Village, but was told that because it was summer, all the horses were grazing in the mountains. So we drove towards the

moisture the river does bring has enabled tenacious patches of stubby grass to grow. Man has every reason to thank the Qilian Mountains for its runoffs, without which the Gobi Desert would have gobbled up even more tracts of land.

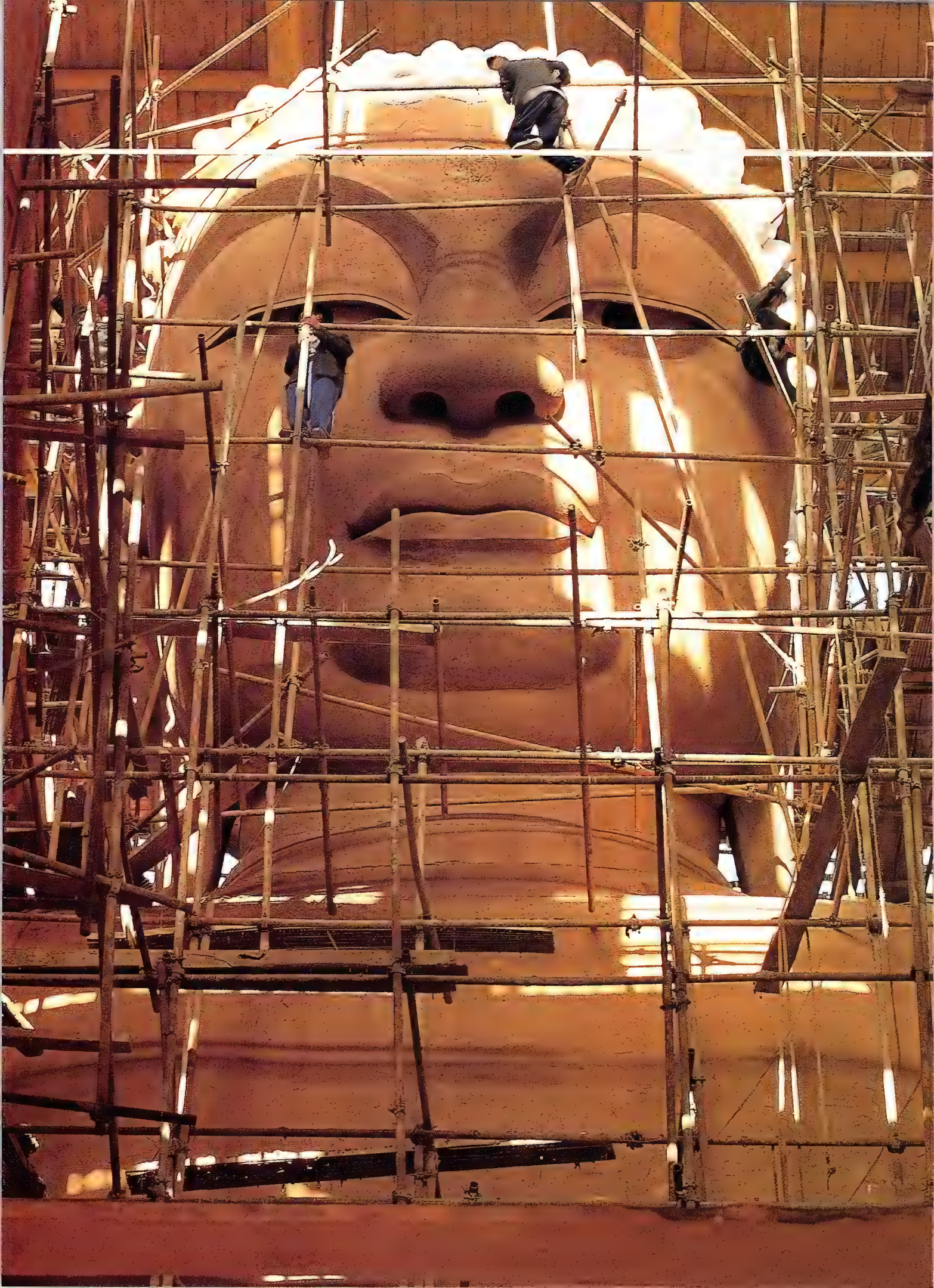
Army Horse Ranch in Shandan

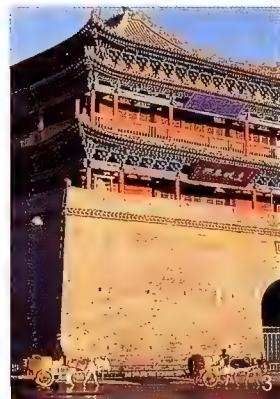
The next morning, we left Wuwei along the Lanzhou-Urumqi Highway heading for Shandan County. The road runs parallel to the Great Wall of the Han and Ming dynasties for quite a few miles. Instead of being made from rammed earth mixed with layers of reed stalks, this section of the Great Wall appears to have been moulded into

northern side of the Qilian Mountains. The terrain along the way was covered with lush expanses of grass studded with flowers. Outside two army tents, a few young men greeted us and treated us with yak yogurt.

It was not until late afternoon that a huge herd emerged from the mountains. But instead of thundering across the grassland, the horses were strolling in a leisurely fashion – these were dams who had been artificially impregnated, we were told.

Night fell and we checked into the ranch's guesthouse. It was so chilly that we had to duck under the thick quilts to keep warm.





1. When completed, this statue will become China's largest indoor clay likeness of Buddha.
2. The magnificent 34.5-metre-long sleeping Buddha in Zhangye.
3. Zhenyuan Tower, the emblem of the ancient city of Zhangye.
4. Food stalls in the city of Zhangye serve snacks prepared in the culinary style of Northwest China.

Temple of Great Buddha

We rented a motor tricycle and drove to the Tongjiuling Mountain six kilometres from the county seat, where the Temple of Great Buddha was under construction with a 10 million-yuan investment raised by the local people. The temple's newly completed brick-and-wood main hall sits on top of the mountain, looking majestic.

Inside the hall, the giant statue of the Buddha has already taken shape but the scaffolding is still in situ so that the workers can grace the clay body with colour and gold. The temple had originally been designed to enshrine the likeness of the bodhisattva Maitreya, but it ended up housing the sculpture of Sakyamuni patterned after a picture of the giant Buddha on Hong Kong's Lantau Island. Zhang Mingcheng, the chief sculptor, heaved a huge sigh of relief when we told him, honestly, that his creation looked exactly like the original. The hall, propped up by 24 wooden pillars – each of which standing 30 metres high and one metre more in diameter – features several floors, each offering a good view of the statue. The Great Buddha which is scheduled to be consecrated later this year will be China's largest indoor clay Buddhist sculpture.

Temple of Sleeping Buddha

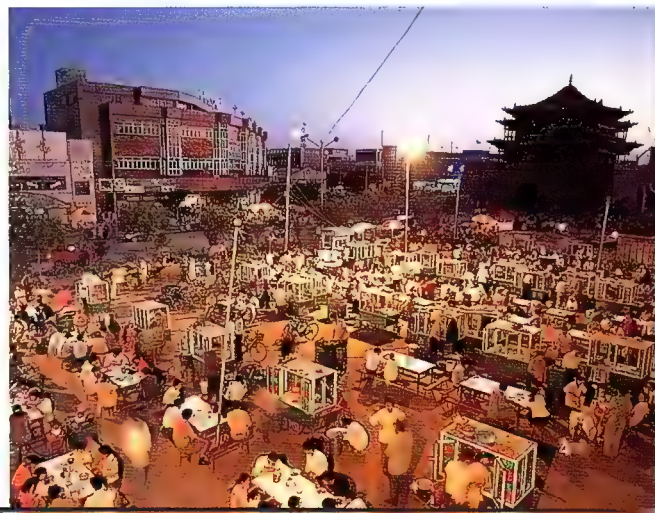
One hour's drive out of Shandan, we arrived at the city of Zhangye and the first thing we saw was a three-storied wooden pagoda in the centre of the city. We drove past it and soon reached the Temple of the Sleeping Buddha built during the Western Xia Dynasty (1038-1227).

Beyond the frontal archway stands the magnificent main hall. Inside, a 34.5-metre-long rendition of Sakyamuni reclines on his side,

his eyes half open, and a faint smile lingering at the corners of his mouth. This piece is a typical example of Western Xia art, yet it has also incorporated traditional artistic elements of the Tang and Song dynasties as well as styles from India and the Western Region. We were told that the drapery and ornamentation were typical of Western Xia art, but unfortunately, the detailing had long since been obliterated as a result of repeated refurbishment undertaken since the Ming and Qing dynasties. Nevertheless, this statue stands as a paragon of the heroism of the Western Xia people.

The Tripitaka Chamber behind the main hall is home to an immense collection of 3,584 volumes of Buddhist scriptures dating back to the Ming Dynasty. There are also the Buddha-Avatasaka Sutra, the Ullambana Sutra, Notes on the West Region Journey of Great Tang's Envoys, as well as calligraphy works and paintings attributed to Dong Qichang, Zheng Banqiao and other famous masters of the Ming and Qing dynasties.

Behind the Tripitaka Chamber stands an earthen pagoda with its top missing.







Previous page:

1. Inside a yurt, herdsmen of the ethnic Yugur are having a dance party.
2. A joyful mood prevails over Hexi Corridor in August, the harvest season.
3. A shepherd in north-west China
4. Samgyi showing his creation, a tangkha painting



1. Situated more than 1,000 metres higher than Zhangye, the Temple of Horse's Hoof is an ideal summer resort.
2. This stone stairway conducts directly to the Temple of Horse's Hoof.
3. Many frescoes adorn the walls of the Temple of Horse's Hoof.
4. The Temple of Horse's Hoof poised on the edge of a cliff

Grottoes at Horse Hoof's Temple

Leaving the ancient city of Zhangye we drove south-east through a rolling sea of wheat crops for a little more than one hour. It was a hot summer's day, but the refreshing coolness of the land 1,000 metres high above sea level at the foot of Linsong Mountain saved us from the torment of the heat wave.

In the valley our car nosed its way along a path carved into the face of a perpendicular cliff. Several caves have been scooped out of the stone wall at intervals of several kilometres, forming an impressive array of grotto art. These belong to Mati (Horse Hoof's) Temple, which encompasses seven grotto groups – the Southern and Northern Temples, the Thousand-Buddha Cave, Avalokitesvara's upper, middle and lower caves, and the Golden Pagoda Temple. The cluster derived its name from the print of a horse's hoof in Cave No. 8 of the Northern Temple, which is said to have been left by a Heavenly Horse descending to the mundane world. Most of the grottoes were drilled during the Western Xia or Yuan dynasties, among which the Golden Pagoda Temple is the best preserved.

The Golden Pagoda Temple located seven kilometres from the Horse Hoof's Temple is famed for its Flying Apsaras images. Crafted by combining sculpture with bas-relief, these images look so vivid that they seem to be dancing and flying out of the stone walls, an artistic phenomenon unseen even in the celebrated Dunhuang Grottoes. As the only access to the grottoes is by horse, we rented two horses from a local herdsmen and hired two guides. We travelled up and down a rugged, uneven footpath, across a sparkling stream. We dismounted at the bottom of a ravine and continued our

journey on foot until we finally reached our destination.

Built during the Jin Dynasty (265-420), the temple has only two grottoes remaining. A stairway conducts to the Eastern Grotto, whose ceiling is propped up by a central pillar with three shrines chiselled into its eastern, southern and western sides. On the ceiling and up the walls are an impressive array of painted sculptures of miscellaneous images – Flying Apsaras, Thousand-Buddha, bodhisattvas, and lotus-born virgin boys. In particular, the images of Flying Apsaras on the verge of a landing are rarely seen in this world. The walls are graced with frescos created during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), but sadly most of them are too defaced to be legible.

Returning to the Horse Hoof's Temple, we took a rest in one of the yurts belonging to an ethnic Yugur family and were treated to mutton and barley wine. Then we went to see the Northern Temple, where 33 grottoes are arranged in seven rows. The tunnel connecting all the grottoes has actually been carved through the cliffs, beginning from the northern end of the first row and reaching the highest grotto in which a stone tablet is inscribed with a text telling the story of how

Sgrol-ma, a goddess in Tibetan Buddhism, kills the Dragon of Fire. Aware that the grottoes hang from a cliff extending upwards to a height of over 30 metres, we could not but admire these unknown artisans of an age gone by.

Emerging from the North Temple, we met Samgye and his two apprentices who were carving Buddhist sculptures in one of the grottoes. During our conversation Samgye had been mixing cotton fibre with red clay, and before long he moulded the mud dough into the face of a bodhisattva.





Fortification in the Desert

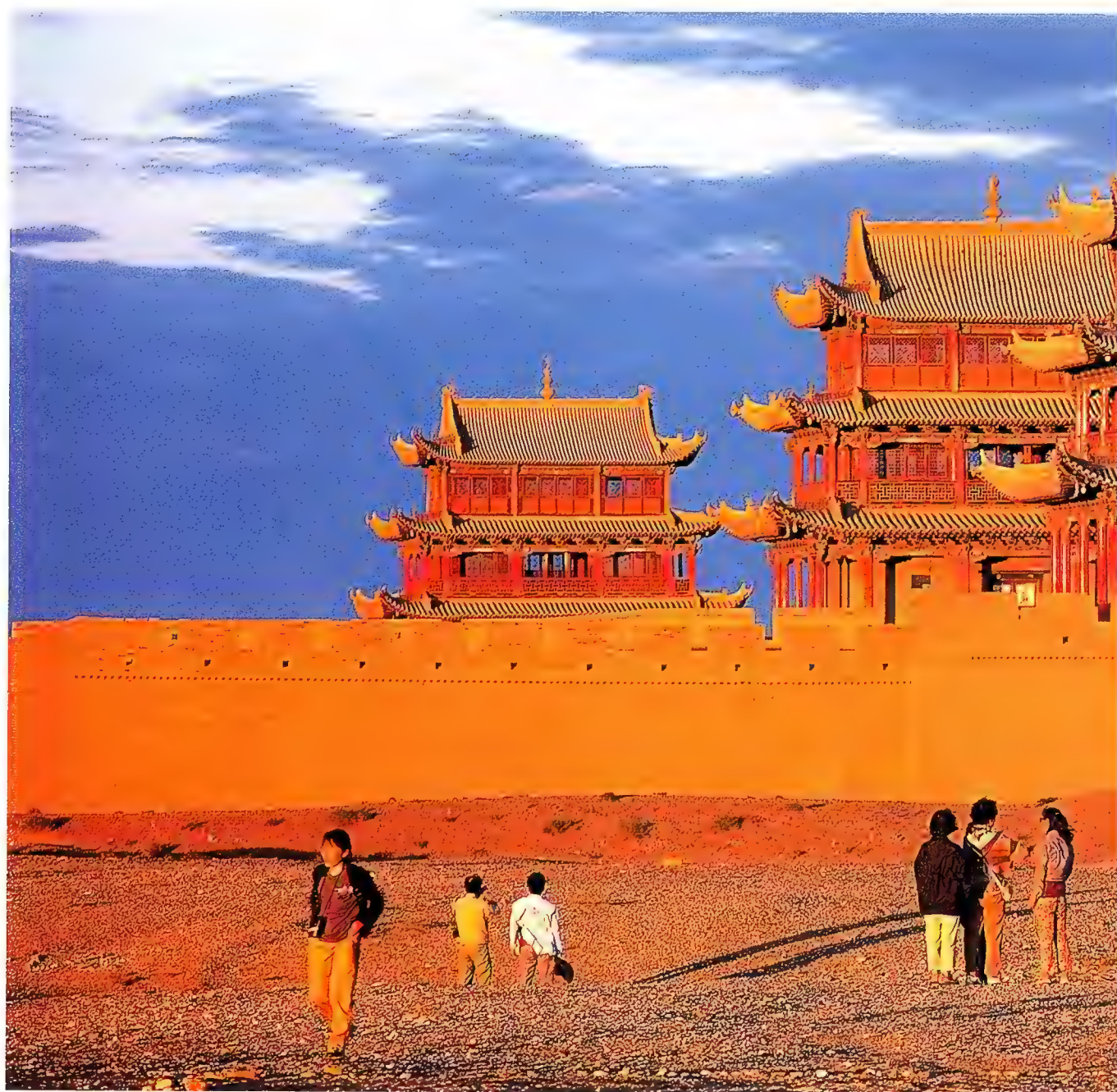
By the time we reached Jiuquan, we had completed two-thirds of our trip to Hexi Corridor. Apart from some Western Han ruins, there is not much to see here from a tourist point of view.

We headed for Jiayuguan Pass immediately after we had marvelled at Jiuquan's luminous jade cups (the main thing Jiuquan is famous for) and paid homage to some historical ruins. A few miles into the journey we could already see the gate tower of Jiayuguan Pass protruding from the boundless desert. The notion that the Great Wall was the creation of Qinshihuang, the founding emperor of the Qin Dynasty, is mistaken as the wall built during his reign extended west only as far as Lintao, a place south of Lanzhou; after his demise the wall continued to grow

west until it reached Jiayuguan Pass during the fifth year of the Hongwu Reign of the Ming Dynasty.

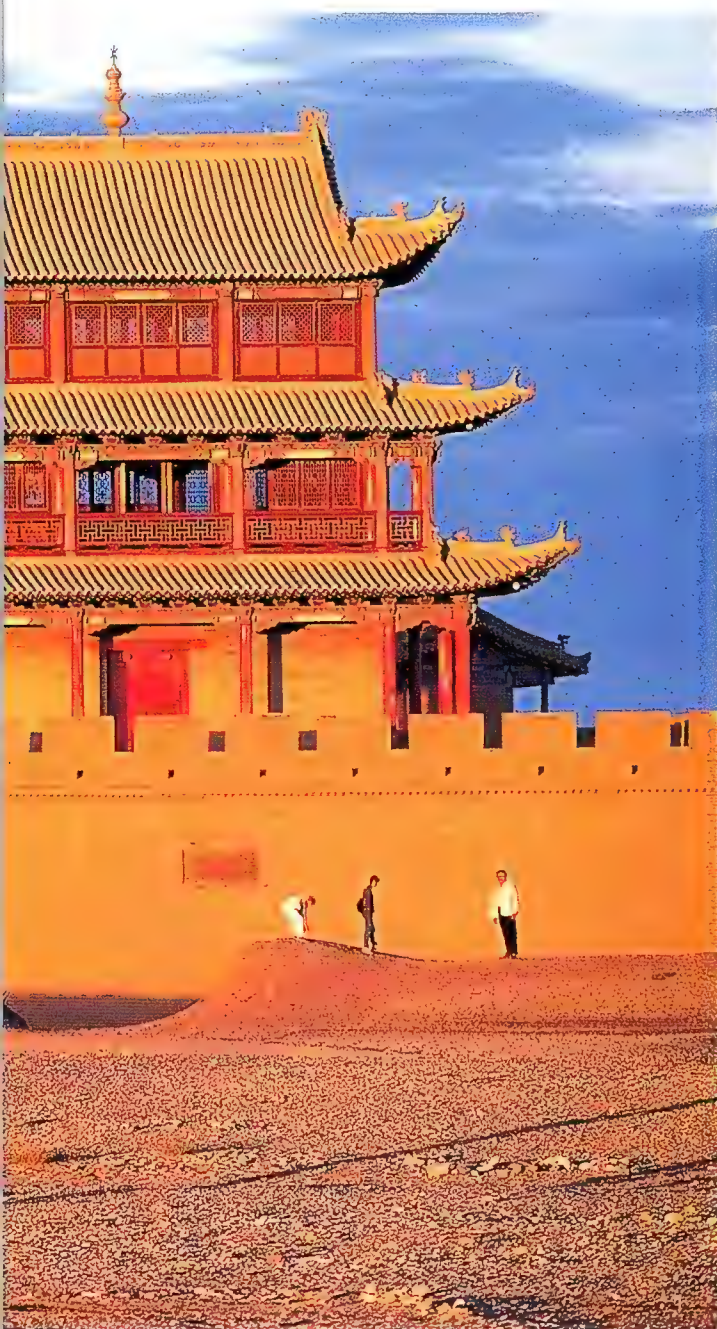
Jiayuguan Pass

West of Jiayuguan Pass the ochre Mazong (Horse's Mane) Mountain rises and undulates like a herd of galloping horses over the terrain. To the south lies the snowy Qilian Mountains. The Gobi Desert between these two mountains is prone to severe sand storms and in ancient times this pass was where numerous soldiers and travellers began their journey en route to the remote West Region, uncertain of what lay ahead of them. Jiayuguan Pass itself was once a colossal fortification composed of inner and outer battlements. One of its wings, known as the "open wall", stretches out until it reaches the foot of the Qilian Mountains to form the southern section of the



western stretch of the Great Wall; and the other wing, which extends north to the waist of the Heishan Mountain, is known as the “hidden wall”. Both wings combine with the fortification to form a complete defence installation.

Those who have been to Badaling near Beijing tend to believe that the Great Wall is built of solid brick. Only those who have also visited Hexi Corridor are able to learn that the western end of the Great Wall is built entirely of rammed earth. The section at Jiayuguan Pass is no exception, but it was built of yellow earth mixed with silk, hemp and mortar. Sometimes glutinous rice glue was added to the mixture, which was then worked into earth bricks. Engineers were personally accountable for their work and were asked to carve the date and their personal data onto each brick so that they could be identified whenever



there were problems with quality control. This is exactly what I had seen when visiting the Zhonghua City Gate of Nanjing, where builders’ personal data had been carved directly onto the bricks built into the wall.

The western-most beacon tower of the Great Wall is found poised at the edge of a cliff beyond which a river rushes by more than 80 metres below. The Great Wall is always likened to a giant dragon snaking through the lands of China. Using this analogy, the giant dragon’s head plunges into the Bohai Sea in the east with a foamy, thunderous splash, while the dragon’s tail, in contrast, rests in the west bathed in solitude. The comparison is subtly poetic.

1. The imposing Jiayuguan Pass at sunset.
2. The western end of the Great Wall rises above the vertical bank of the Taolai River like a natural screen.
3. At Jiayuguan Pass: A boy posing as an emperor.
4. In western China the Great Wall is built mostly of rammed earth – Jiayuguan Pass is no exception.



Tombs of Wei and Jin Dynasties

In the Gobi Desert 20 kilometres to the north-east of Jiayuguan Pass are more than 1,000 tombs dating back to the Wei and Jin dynasties. Of them 13 have been opened to visitors, and eight of them feature colourful murals. A steep stone stairway descends to Tomb No. 1, which contains two dome-

shaped chambers. Each of the four brick walls have been painted with pictures. Despite the fact that the artists only used brown and red, the simplistic coloration has worked well to bring the images alive.

Tomb No. 1 belongs to Duan Qing, governor of Jiuquan Prefecture. Most of the murals found in his tomb portray his life of debauchery, but there are also pictures reflecting the daily activities of the common

people, such as farming, sericulture and husbandry. A picture featuring a plough drawn by two buffaloes is believed to be the earliest illustration existent depicting the traditional farming methods of the Chinese. The original drawings were touched up using pigments in the Han style.



Rammed-Earth Castle

Beyond Jiayuguan Pass the vistas of the Gobi Desert widened considerably. It was



very hot, and the shimmering horizon had a hypnotic effect on us. We were jerked back to reality when our jeep suddenly screeched to a halt, and we found ourselves confronted by an ancient, crudely built castle made of rammed earth. It was totally empty inside. An interesting legend surrounds this tiny, dusty castle: One night Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty dreamed of an ancient city that he had never seen before. He immediately ordered that its whereabouts be found. When his scouts reported they had found a place called Qiaowan in the Gobi Desert similar to the one he had visualised, he dispatched a high ranking official, together with a large sum of money, to construct a replica of the Forbidden City on the site. The corrupt official and his son only erected a small castle and made away with most of the money. When the emperor got word, he sentenced them both to death and had them skinned. Their skin was made into two drums which were hung at the city gate to serve as a deterrent against further crime. In a museum



located by the highway we saw what is believed to be one of the two drums.

Yulin Grottoes

Anxi is prone to strong winds and sandstorms, but luckily when we arrived the weather was uncharacteristically calm, so we set out for the Yulin Grottoes which are scattered on both banks of the Yulin River 35 kilometres to the south of Anxi. The grottoes are being given a face-lift. Housed within these caves are a collection of frescos totalling more than 1,000 square metres and containing more than 100 painted sculptures created during a period spanning 800 years during the Tang and Yuan dynasties. The murals in Grotto No. 25 offer what are believed to be the finest examples of the Tang-dynasty painting. The heavenly kings, Manjusri, Samantabhadra, Sukhavati, deities from the Sukhavati Western Paradise, and Amitabha are all graphic, well-conceived images executed in flowing lines and bright colours reminiscent of the Tang-dynasty painter Wu Daozi. Murals attributed to the Five Dynasties, the early Song, Western Xia and Yuan dynasties represent scenes of ploughing, harvesting, wedding celebrations, feasting, chess playing, wine making, smelting, and music and dance.

In a Western Xia-dynasty grotto is a mural depicting the famous story of the Tang-dynasty monk Xuan Zang on his pilgrimage to the West in search of Buddhist scriptures.



1. An ancient castle sitting alongside the Lanzhou-Urumqi Highway.
2. The brick paintings in the ancient tombs reflect the local folklore from remote antiquity.
3. The Xincheng Gobi Desert is strewn with more than 1,000 tombs dating back to the Wei and Jin dynasties.
4. Murals in Cave No.25 of the Yulin Grottoes

Mogao Grottoes at Dunhuang

We left Anxi and the Lanzhou-Urumqi Highway and headed south. The landscape gradually became greener and the air fresher and moist. The nearby Danghe River gurgled merrily as it rushed forward. As soon as we saw the sculpture of a female dancer playing a pipa carried on her back we knew we had reached the much anticipated city of Dunhuang and the fatigue that had built up over the past several days immediately evaporated.

Dunhuang, once an important town on the Silk Road, turned out to be much smaller than I had imagined. It merely covers several square kilometres. But everything we saw in the city urged us to hurry to the grottoes, be it the street sculptures, the exterior decorations of the buildings, or the arts and crafts for sale in the stores. Everything was redolent in the unique tradition of the Mogao Grotto art. We quickened our pace towards the grottoes and the treasure-troves which lay hidden inside.

The Mogao Grottoes are situated on the eastern side of the Mingsha (Humming Sand) Mountain 25 kilometres south-east of Dunhuang. From a distance, the 492 grottoes resemble a huge beehive planted in a cliff which extends for 1.5 kilometres from north to south. A closer look reveals that the grottoes are arranged in a series of zigzag rows and are inter-linked by bridges suspended in mid-air. Now most of the grottoes are locked behind aluminium gates and windows which have been donated by Mr. Run Run Shaw, a well-known entrepreneur of Hong Kong.

In 366 Monk Le Shun arrived at this spot and had a vision of a thousand images of Buddha appearing in the sky above the Sanwei Mountain. Dropping to his knees, he made a vow to turn the site into a sanctuary and set about digging the first of the temple grottoes into the cliffs. Thus for the ensuing 1,000 years, the ancient town of Dunhuang reverberated with the sound of chisels, hammers and axes as local artisans toiled over the monumental task of building the Mogao Grottoes.

Our guide, a young lady from the Dunhuang Research Academy, told us proudly that there was so much to see that it was impossible to cover it all in a single day. The murals alone have a combined area of 45,000 square metres – if lined up in a three-metre-high row they stretch for 15 kilometres. She suggested it would be more enjoyable for us to take a close look at a few selected grottoes rather than giving all of them a cursory glance. With a flashlight in hand she immediately got us to our feet. It was indeed a journey through time, to a bygone era. Inside one grotto we saw a Northern Wei-dynasty (386-534) statue of a bodhisattva sitting cross-legged, in a style borrowed from the Gandhara art shortly after Buddhism found its way from India to China. In another, the picture stories of the Saddharmapundarika Sutra drawn during the Sui Dynasty

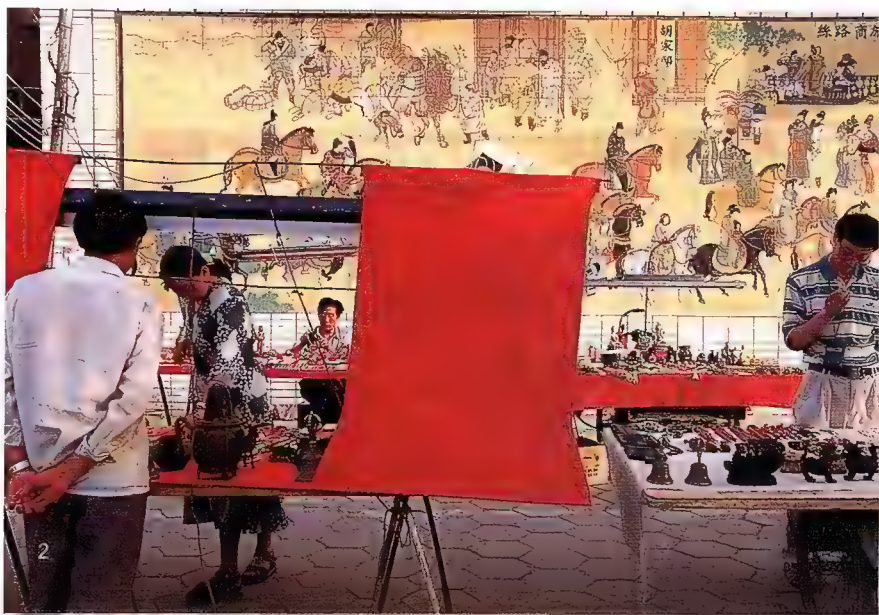
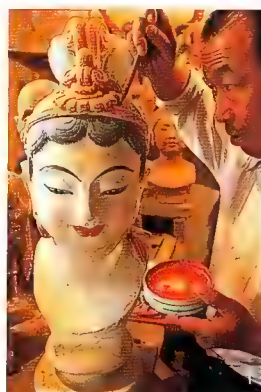
(581-618) is breathtaking for its fluid, graceful lines. In yet another grotto a female dancer strikes her now world-famous pose of plucking her pipa behind her back. She is gorgeously portrayed in a technique that only the masters of the Tang Dynasty were capable of. During half a day, our young guide had led us through a journey lasting more than 1,000 years.

Humming Sand Dunes

Returning to Dunhuang in the late afternoon, we journeyed on for another six kilometres to the south and arrived at the Humming Sand Mountain. The "mountain" is in fact an immense sand dune where it is the


practice of all visitors to try to scramble to the top. The sand dune gets its name from the sand which hums as it runs down the hill as one tries to reach the top. The harder I tried to climb up, the deeper my feet sank into the sand, and the faster I tried to

move the more I slipped downhill. Eventually I resorted to crawling up on all fours, like an infant. At last I reached the solid top. The silence was uncanny and all around me the endless desert appeared to float westward under the setting sun, like an ocean streaked with ever-changing





ripples. It was a magnificent sight.

As I boldly strode downhill, the sand around me hummed like an ensemble of traditional wood and string instruments. The Crescent-Moon Spring at the foot of the hill is a 50-metre long, 15-metre wide oasis dotted with reed plants growing profusely in its limpid water. As I seated myself in the pavilion by the water with a cup of tea, I had the feeling that I was in a tea house south of the Yangtse River. 

1. A Local artist painting the replica of a sculpture from the high Tang period.
2. Souvenirs on sale in the streets of Dunhuang are redolent of the spirit of the celebrated Silk Road.
3. A mystical mood prevails over the imitation castles of the Dunhuang Mountain Villa.
4. Guests staying at the Dunhuang Guesthouse are entertained to an evening of song and dance entitled *Showers of Flowers on the Silk Road*.



TRAVELLER'S TIPS

Transport:

Flights from Lanzhou to Dunhuang take one and a half hours, however, it robs one of the opportunity to see the great desert, the snow-capped mountains and nature's other wonders. For those who want to marvel at China's frontier land in relative comfort, the train proves an ideal means of transport. The Ürümqi-Lanzhou Railway has major stations at Wuwei, Zhangye, Jiuquan, Jiayuguan Pass and Dunhuang along its route. You may take a bus from Lanzhou if you have enough time to spare and if you are eager to see the sights of Hexi Corridor and learn something about the cultural relics, historical sites and local habits and customs.

Weather:

The climate in the desert of Hexi Corridor is characterised by hot summers and cold winters, with brief and sometimes indistinct springs and autumns. There is a dramatic disparity between day and night temperatures. The average temperature is 10°C in spring and 6°C in autumn. Precipitation is below 100 mm due to ample sunshine. Average wind velocity is high because Hexi Corridor is hemmed in by the Qilian Mountains in the west and the Mazong Mountain in the north. Runoffs from the Qilian and other mountains supply the precious water



Hexi Corridor abounds in melons and fruits.



A night spent on this brick-built bed proves to be an unforgettable experience.

needed to keep the meadows green on low-lying areas.

Accommodation:

Lanzhou: Jincheng Guesthouse, Lanzhou Hotel.

Standard room: approx. 300 yuan.

Wuwei: Tianma Guesthouse.

Standard room: approx. 200 yuan.

Zhangye: Zhangye Guesthouse.

Standard room: approx. 200 yuan.

Jiuquan: Jiuquan Guesthouse.

Standard room: approx. 20 yuan.

Jiayuguan: Jiayuguan Guesthouse, Great Wall Guesthouse. Standard room: approx. 150 yuan.

Dunhuang: Dunhuang Guesthouse, Dunhuang Mountain Villa. Standard room: approx. 450 yuan.



The dining room of the Dunhuang Mountain Villa evinces an air of classic sanctity.

Produce from the Hexi Corridor:

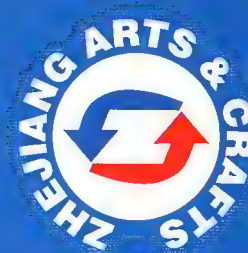
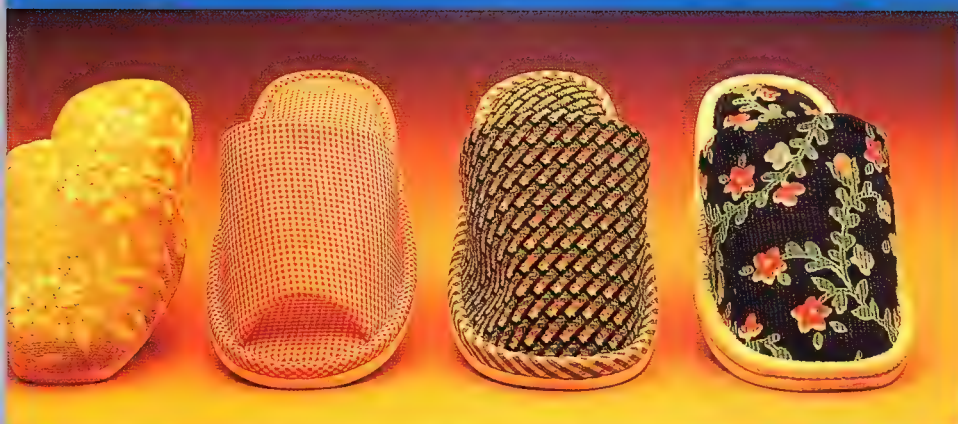
Bailan Melon: Also known as Lanzhou Honey Melon, has a refreshing sweet taste and with a sugar content as high as 12 to 18 per cent. Qingbaishi, a special species produced on the northern shore of the Yellow River is the best.

Mapizui Melon: A mutation from the Hami melon from Xinjiang. The name "mapi", meaning "coarse skin" derives from the fact that the melon grows coarse fissures on its skin. The Mapizui melon ripens in mid-July and has a sugar content of 9.2 per cent.

Anxi Watermelon: With a thin skin, this watermelon has a juicy flesh with a sugar content of 10 per cent and upwards. In summer the fragrant and sweet Anxi watermelon has a cooling effect and also stimulates the appetite and aids digestion.

Li Guang's Apricot from Dunhuang: This special fruit from the oases of the Gobi Desert is known for its thin skin and wart-like protrusions. When ripe it turns orange with yellow fragrant and juicy flesh. It is named after General Li Guang, commander of a western expedition during the Han Dynasty.

Translated by Ling Yuan



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N A T U R E

MT. MA'AN— A NATURAL BOTANICAL GARDEN

Photos & Article by Li Tianshe



Hidden within Ebian County in Sichuan Province is a vast area of primeval forest. Surrounded by serrated mountain peaks shrouded in mist and cloud, it appears dark and foreboding even from a distance.

Ma'an Mountain rises 4,288 metres above sea level. On its south-east side are mountain slopes and valleys covering an area of more than 180 square

kilometres, overgrown with various kinds of plants, many of them having medicinal properties.

Over the years, various research teams have been sent into the mountain to carry out scientific investigations. So far they have discovered in excess of 20 rare species of plants and based on preliminary explorations in the area and limited historical data, the flora can be divided into two categories: complex and ancient. There are, for example, more than 15 different kinds of azalea growing in this green treasure-house, plus numerous plants which can be used in medicinal preparations. However, more than two-thirds of the whole area remains unexplored.

It is estimated that there are about **3,000 rare seed plants**, among which roughly 30 are on the verge of extinction and have therefore been placed under state protection; a further 1,500 are herbal plants, and 200 others are classified as flowers and plants rare in the world. Two of the world's rare species of azalea, the Ehei Azalea and Heizhugou Azalea, were discovered in this area.

Azaleas grow in abundance on this mountain, in particular, on the south-eastern slope at 3,600-4,000 metres above sea level where there is a large azalea forest covering a total area of seven square kilometres. The Azalea originated from China and is famous worldwide. About 40 different species grow in this area, far exceeding any other place in the world in terms of variety. In addition, 21 other rare plants have been discovered in the primeval forest, including dove tree, sheen-leaf dove tree, quince, Anise magnolia, Emei rhubarb, *Coptis chinensis*, *Wingceltis*, *Gastrodia elata*, lily, *Magnolia officinalis*, Chinese yew, etc.

Dove tree, now classified as a first-class state-protected plant, was once distributed all over the world, but it survives only in a few places in China now. Anise magnolia is another of China's special plants.

Gastrodia elata and *Coptis chinensis* are important in Chinese medicine, and Emei *Coptis chinensis* is the best of its kind. Chinese yew and another plant has been proved, through scientific research, to be **an anti-cancer drug.**

Because of the area's complicated ecosystem and unique environment, many medicinal herbs grow luxuriantly on this mountain. According to the records made through investigation, more than 500 medicinal plants of 70 families have been found on the mountain, including lycopodium, *Laranthus yadariki*, mistletoe, rhubarb, *Magnolia officinalis*, false ginseng, *Philodendron*, asparagus, *Pinellia ternata*.... Among these, Chinese yew is very effective in treating leukaemia and cancer. The drug made from it is regarded as the most hopeful in the fight against cancer among those discovered in the last 10 years, and on the international market one gram of it sells for as much as US\$1,000.

The Mt. Ma'an Scenic Area which has not yet seen too much intrusion by man, is a **natural museum** – a kingdom of plants rich in resources of genetic seeds where a primitive, natural environment still exists. It provides a good study ground for those wishing to learn about plants and their diversified generation, the process and reasons for their evolution, and how to protect them.

Mt. Ma'an also attracts tourists who come here to enjoy the natural landscape with its lakes, changeable weather, snow-capped peaks, grasslands, forests, and rare animals and plants. We suggest the following route: Begin from Sihe Town, 283 kilometres from Chengdu, and walk along the Forestry Centre Road to Goukou, Ronghongde, Guituimo, Jiersheluo, Huliping, Dujuanhanyu, Hulishan, Jinzita Hill, the main peak of Mt. Ma'an, Yerengu, Shentaolin, Woluowaqu, Forest No. 611, and then return to Sihe Town.

Translated by Xiong Zhenru



Caltha palustris

Distributed in areas by water, marshland or found in forests in Yunnan, Sichuan, Gansu, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Hebei, Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang as well as

north-east China, the plant belongs to a primitive plant species and is significant in the study of the origin, and evolution, of angiosperm. Its beautiful yellow sepals look like flower petals.



Dove Tree

One picture shows the petals, the other shows the fruit. When in bloom, the flower has two big petals, looking like a flying bird, hence the name "dove tree". It is under first-class state protection. Originally, it distributed itself throughout the world but during the Quaternary Period, it vanished almost everywhere and has only survived in a few places in China. In the Heizhu Valley, it is found in areas 1,600-2,700 metres above sea level, which is a rare phenomenon.



Heizhu Valley

In the Heizhu Valley, near the scenic spot "Jade Pillar Amidst Azalea", a limpid stream flows out from a large primitive azalea forest at 3,600-3,700 metres above sea level. The stream falls over a sheer cliff to produce a kaleidoscopic waterfall, which has a drop of 100 metres.

Rock Cabbage (*Bergenia purpurascens*)

A perennial plant with a height of 0.2-0.35 metres. It usually has six or seven raceme flowers which are violet or purple. On its stem are brown tassels and its five-split calyx is in the shape of a bell. Found on the east slope of Mt. Ma'an, this plant grows in shaded, wet areas 3,000-4,000 metres above sea level in Yunnan, Sichuan and Tibet. It is a herb used for treating dizziness and haematemesis.



Berneuxia tibetica Decne

A perennial herbaceous plant growing on mountain cliffs or on slopes over 2,500 metres above sea level. It is distributed in Sichuan, Tibet and Yunnan, yet, it can be seen everywhere on the forest floor in the Heizhu Valley. Its white flowers are held on top of long, purple stems making the blossom look like stars in the sky. The whole of this attractive plant can be used to treat colds, coughs, asthma and trauma.



Clematis montana Bush.-Ham.

A liana (or climbing plant) found growing in hilly lands 1,600-3,800 metres above sea level. It is distributed in southern Tibet, Yunnan, Guizhou, northern Guangxi, Anhui, Hubei, Sichuan, southern Gansu, Shaanxi and south-western Henan. Belonging to a primitive horde, it is of important scientific value for the study of the origin, and evolution, of algae. Its four sepals look like flower petals. The vines twist themselves around tree branches and when in bloom, creating an enchanting forest scene.



This tract of primitive forest formed by fir, azalea and bryophyte lies at an altitude of 3,100-3,200 metres above sea level. Thick, strong fir trees and tall azalea bushes and dense bamboo groves make it impossible to pass. The bryophyte grows in a rich variety of colours and a hazy mist covers the forest all year round.



Helmet Fungi

Yellow in colour, it hangs from the trunk of fir trees. Its short stem inserts into the tree's bark to draw fluid. It is surrounded by lichen, which is a paragenesis of algae and fungi. It is still not sure what elements it contains. It was found in the Shentao Forest 3,300 metres above sea level in the Heizhu Valley. It is pretty rare.



Thamnolia vermicularia

The lichenous part of Thamnolia vermicularia, it is a paragenesis of algae and fungi. It contains Thamnolic acid, Sauamatic acid and Baeomycesic acid, as well as Darabitol and Mannitol. Therefore, it is effective in eliminating heat and can quench thirst to treat a cough caused by pneumonia, manic-depressive psychosis, neurasthenia and high blood pressure. This is a rare traditional Chinese herbal medicine.

Cypripedium tibeticum King ex Rolfe

Found in south-western Sichuan, north-western Yunnan, eastern and southern Tibet, the flower of this plant has a unique shape and is extremely beautiful. Protection should be given to this rare wild plant.



Kangding Radix Aconiti

A herbaceous plant growing in mountainous area 2,700-4,000 metres above sea level in the western part of Sichuan. It belongs to a primitive horde and is of great significance in the study of the origin, and systematic evolution, of angiosperm. Because of the special alkaline substance it contains, it can be used to dispel cold and wind, and to relieve pain and spasms for the treatment of serious rheumatism, neuralgia, etc. However, it is extremely poisonous.





The main peak of the Ma'an Mountain is 4,288 metres above sea level, the highest in the south-western fringe of the Sichuan Basin. Various plants grow at the top of the peak, at the middle, and around the bottom are numerous marshlands densely covered with wild plants and flowers. The marshlands are ideal for the rare medicinal herbs such as Chinese caterpillar fungus and *Fritillaria thunbergii*. This beautiful piece of mysterious land in Heizhu Valley holds great appeal for scientists.

Some 1,911 metres into the Heizhu Valley, one comes across the 20-metre high Waterfall Cliff. In summer, when there is a lot of rain, water roars and crashes over the cliff, while in autumn the water subsides to produce three streams which create a magnificent scene beside ancient trees and massive rocks. This is the Stone Gate Pass, so called because of its precipitous peaks of basalt.



Translated by Li Zhengguo

Baoxing Tree Frog

The picture shows the metamorphosis of the tadpole into a young frog – four legs have grown but its tail is still attached. Wide green stripes are visible on its back, and on its toes are suckers, enabling it to climb onto trees. This frog was found near Woluwadian and No. 611 Forest lying 2,600 metres above sea level in Heizhu Valley.



ACROBATS

DISCOVERIES

THE ACROBATS OF LIAOCHENG



Photos & article by Li Nan



YEARS OF TRAINING FOR JUST ONE MINUTE ON STAGE

'TWO AND A HALF' ACROBATIC TOWNS

On the western plain of Shandong Province lies the city of Liaocheng – one of nine trading ports along the Grand Canal during the Ming and Qing dynasties.

I came to know Liaocheng simply because I loved its folk art – acrobatics, and so, spurred on by my great interest for this art, I decided to visit Liaocheng.

Within China, Liaocheng is well-known as being a town of acrobats. According to the old acrobats I spoke with, there are just two and half towns famous for acrobats: one is Liaocheng, the other is Wujiao (Hebei Province) and the half refers to the Tianqiao market place in Beijing. Liaocheng's acrobatic history, if counting Cao Zhi in the Three Kingdoms period, goes back 1,700 years. More recently in 1921, Zhang Zhengzhen led a circus from Liaocheng to Korea where he performed for six years, winning great popularity. His was the first acrobatic troupe in China to go abroad. In the 1950s there were nine major acrobatic troupes and circuses in Liaocheng in addition to countless smaller ones. In the early 1960s, many actors and actresses from Liaocheng played roles in popular films like *Red Peony and Outstanding Acrobats*. The Chinese winner of the highest international prize for acrobats, the "Golden Clown", also came from Liaocheng. However, during the "cultural revolution" which started in 1966, the art of acrobatics died only to reappear on the stage in 1971.

Besides the professional acrobatic troupes in Liaocheng, there are also many "acrobatic villages" and "acrobatic families". For instance, Luzhuang Village in Dong'e County is a typical acrobatics village. Among the 62 families, 40 are engaged in the art of acrobatics. Many of them began practising from a very early age and have continued into old age. The fields, threshing grounds and courtyards are the gymnasiums in which they practise, while farming tools, bowls, chopsticks, even melons and cobs of corn become their props. Today 50 of the village's 300 inhabitants are working in professional acrobatic troupes.

Over the years Liaocheng has nurtured a great number of professional acrobats. Many schools have been set up to train children to become the acrobats of the future.

The Liaocheng Acrobatic Troupe and a children's acrobatic training centre is located about 1,000 metres to the north of Guangyue Tower in old city of Liaocheng. Two years ago, 33 students began training in acrobatics after passing a strict examination and paying their tuition of 5,000 yuan. Many villagers in the surrounding area expect their children to take up the career of an acrobat.

It was the first time that I saw acrobats in training. Aged between six and 15, these students begin their day at 5:30 in the morning. Every day, they have to spend dozens of hours practising. Under the strict supervision of their instructors the students have to





perform handstands, somersaults, body-building exercises, leg presses, the splits and other routine training. The teachers know that if they expect their pupils to have a bright future, they themselves have to work hard and at the same time push the kids hard. If the students are not performing an exercise well, the teachers shout at them or even punish

them with a tap of their teaching sticks. What the students are repeatedly told is: "A one-minute performance on stage requires 10 years of training."

These country children are used to enduring hardships and they know well what they are doing. I was surprised to see them performing handstands for dozens of minutes. But when I asked them whether they felt dizzy, they all laughed. One boy told me that the first few times he did them he had felt dizzy and even felt pain in eyes, but after a while he got used to it. I learned that a good acrobat should be able to stand on their hands for one and a half hours!

It was time for lunch. The children lined up beside the platform, each with a bowl in hand. Unfortunately, since the local economy in Liaocheng is still underdeveloped and people's living standards remain low, their meal seldom includes meat. The dish is often very salty, presumably for replacing the salts lost from the body during training.

I lived at the acrobatic school for 12 days, following the same regime and eating the same food. When I arrived home I became ill. Perhaps it was the diet. Recalling the conditions at the acrobatic school, I felt pity for these children.

Previous page: Students have to practise handstands every day.

1. After two years of training, the students are ready to perform.

2. Li Qianqian practising at home

3. Although the meal is meagre, the students never loose their appetite.

4. Students practising in their dorm

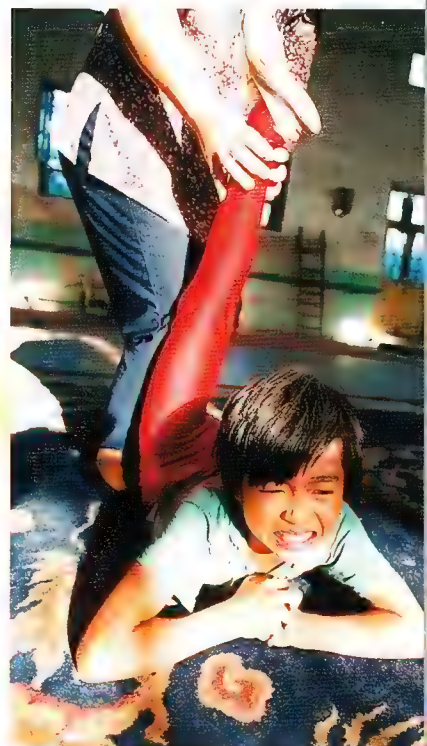


ALWAYS PRACTISING

Tears rolled down the face of 9-year-old Jingjing while she practised the splits. I felt sorry for her. Her coach told me she showed great promise as an

acrobat. Jingjing understood what her coach expected from her and so she did not yell out in pain. Later, the girl told me she would never give up training since everyone at the school worked hard.

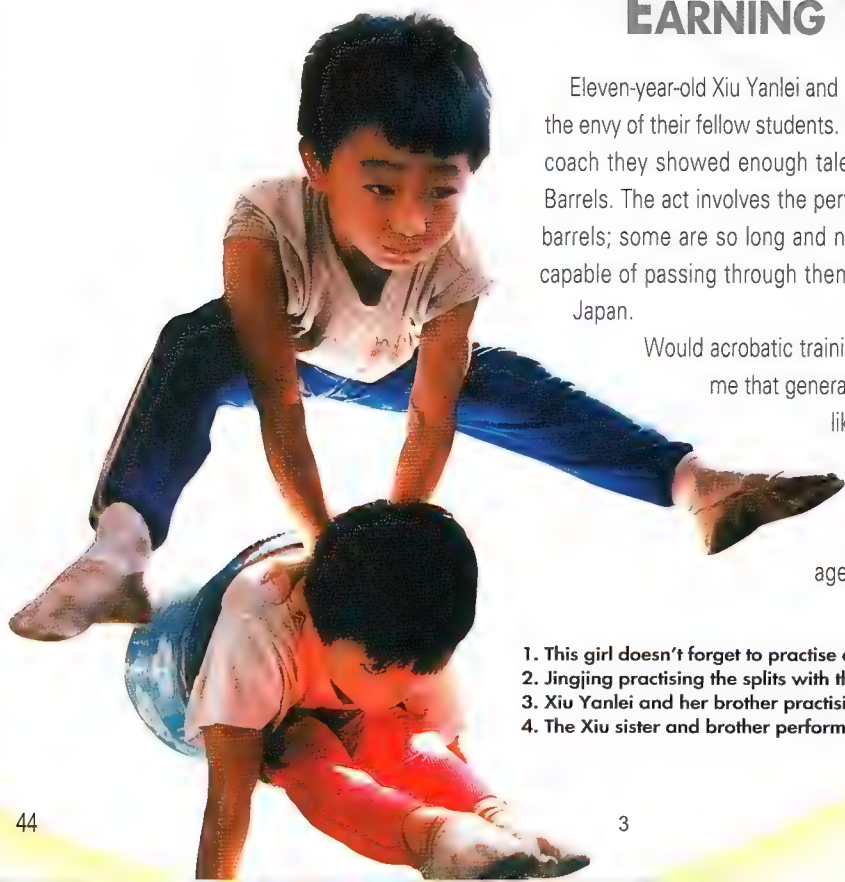
Like most children of her age Jingjing loves to play, but she never forgets to practise; for example, while playing cards she take the opportunity to balance bricks on head. Among all the children there, Jingjing is the most fortunate. Her family has moved from the countryside into the city where they own a small business nearby, therefore, Jingjing does not have to eat the meagre food provided by the school.



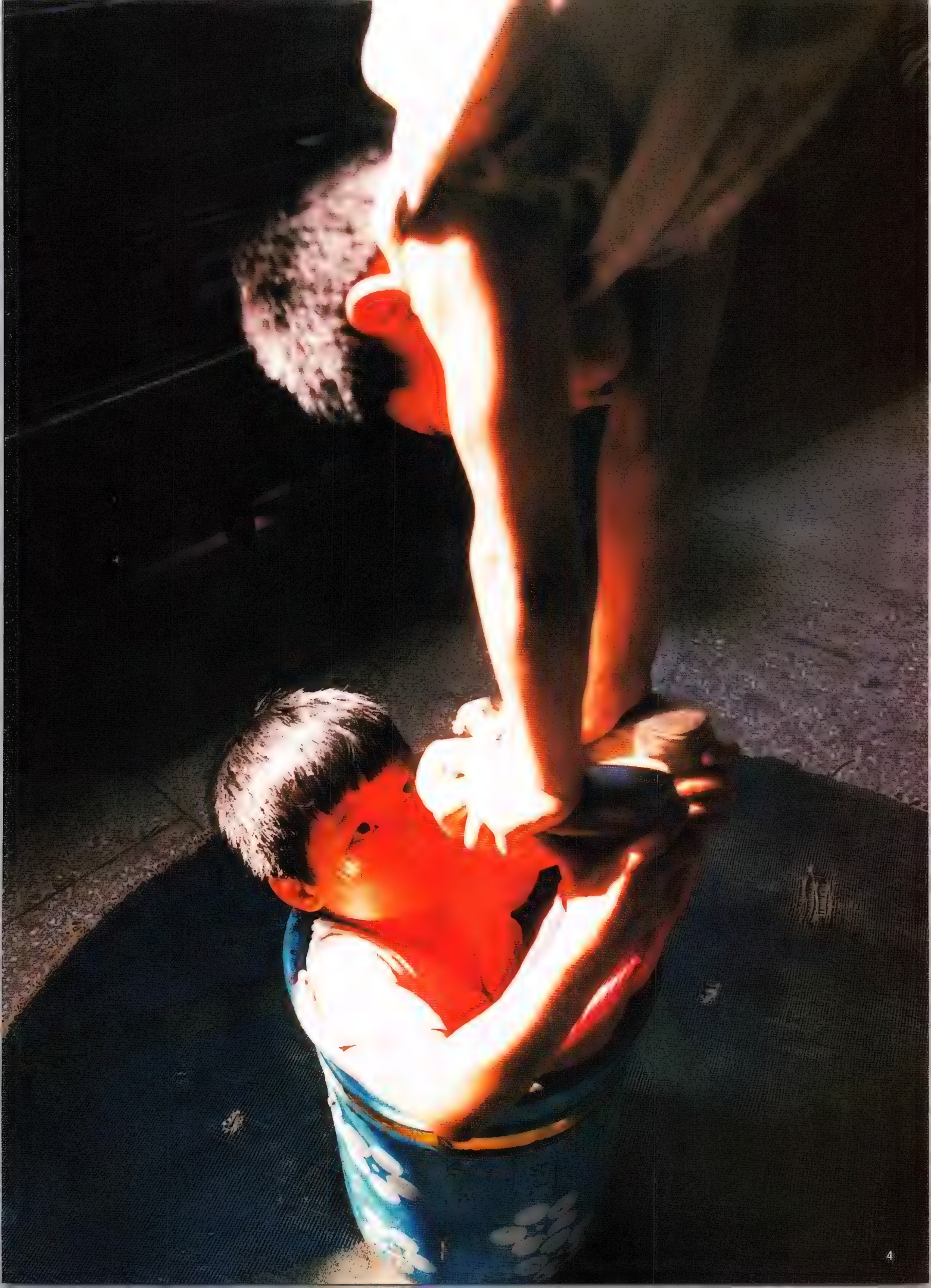
EARNING WHILE STUDYING

Eleven-year-old Xiu Yanlei and 10-year-old Xiu Zeguang are sister and brother. They are the envy of their fellow students. After just one year of study under the instruction of their coach they showed enough talent to be given their own act called Passing Through Barrels. The act involves the performers passing through a series of differently-shaped barrels; some are so long and narrow that one is amazed at how the human body is capable of passing through them. Yanlei and Zeguang have performed in Beijing and Japan.

Would acrobatic training affect their physical development? Their coach told me that generally it does not, in fact, slightly-built actors and actresses like Yanlei and Zeguang were particularly suitable for this act, and that usually performers stay longer on stage with this act. One example was Guan Yuhe in the early 1950s who continued to perform until the age of 70.



1. This girl doesn't forget to practise even when playing cards.
2. Jingjing practising the splits with the help of her teacher
3. Xiu Yanlei and her brother practising
4. The Xiu sister and brother performing their act, Passing Through Barrels





ONE HUNDRED PERFORMANCES

I was fascinated by two girls training by a window in the practise hall. Their names were Yang Chunhong and Zhao Na and they were rehearsing the act called Balancing Bowls on Head While Cycling on a High Wheel. One by one they placed the bowls on their feet and then kicked them high into the air, either to each other or to themselves, where the bowls were caught and balanced on their heads. The different ways of kicking made me feel dizzy.

When I complimented Zhao Na on her performance, she modestly replied: "Compared with Aunt Fu, we still fall far short." Fu is an actress with the Changchun Acrobatic Troupe who gives the best performance of Balancing Bowls on Head While Cycling on a Big Ball. In testimony of her talent she received two special prizes at the 12th International Circus Festival. Actress Fu has become their idol.

Yang Chunhong and Zhao Na are the oldest students in their group. Yang was already 13 and Zhao 11 when they entered the school. According to the coaches, they usually recruited a few older students to play the basic roles in performances such as Pole Holding and Balancing & Cycling. As a result of their hard work, these two have proved their talents by having their own act. They have given more than 100 performances, and at one time in Shanghai, they gave three performances a day. In addition, Yang is also practising magic and Zhao is training with ropes and the whip.

GREAT FLEXIBILITY

Nine-year-old Qin Wenjuan and 10-year-old Hu Jing are endowed with flexible bodies, so soon after entering the school they began training as contortionists and managed to achieve a standard good enough to perform in Thailand where their act was well-received. As I watched them practise I admired the nimble, graceful movements of their perfect bodies. Quietly, I asked their coach whether they could hurt themselves. She said that quite a few contortionists do develop sore hips as they grow older. They get on stage as early as 12 years old, but normally their stage career is over before the age of 30.



1. Qin Wenjuan practising contortion
2. Hu Jing times her handstand.
3. Yang Chunhong and Zhao Na practising their special act, Balancing Bowls on Head While Cycling.





XU JICHENG'S ACROBATIC FAMILY

Perhaps the most interesting family of acrobats in Liaocheng is that of Xu Jichang's. As I approached his home I could hear the clicking sound of the acrobatic instruments being used. In the courtyard I saw six members of the family practising.

Xu Jicheng told me that the whole family often practise or discuss acrobatics together. Xu, 54, is the core of this acrobatic family. Having been trained as a child, he became a member of the privately-owned Dong'e Acrobatics Troupe (founded in 1952 and later renamed Liaocheng Acrobatics Troupe) and is now working as a designer and director.

Xu Baihai, Xu's 31-year-old son, and his wife, Liu Airong, are the mainstay of the Liaocheng Acrobatics Troupe. The acts performed by the couple such as Balancing Bowls and Love Between the Jar and the Bowl have long been admired by specialists. Xu's 21-year-old nephew, Ji Xiaofang, one of the troupe's most promising young acrobats, is the first in China to be able to spin 41 dishes at the same time. The young actor's success has drawn attention from other acrobatic troupes – some have even offered him a much higher salary in order to hire him – but Xiaofang has never left Liaocheng. Xu's another nephew, Ji Xiaoguang, and his niece, Li Qianqian, both having gone on stage after two years of training at the acrobatics school, will soon perform in Japan.

Xu and his family have given their own performances in two national art festivals. They have visited Germany,

Japan and Thailand where they were praised by their audiences as "people of wonder whose performance can never to be forgotten". One member of the family told me about a romantic episode which happened while Ji Xiaofang was on a 20-day tour of Japan. Last year he performed in Yamaguchi and two other cities in Japan. After a few performances, Xiaofang noticed the face of a young Japanese girl who appeared at each of their shows even though the stage venues were at least 50 kilometres apart. Why did she follow them like a shadow at each of the 40 performances? As Xiaofang was wondering, the girl came to their residence to see him. Xiaofang, a shy boy, was reluctant to see the girl but eventually he accepted a gift from her. On the gift card the girl had drawn a heart and written the words, "I love Ji Xiaofang". When the Chinese Acrobatics Troupe was about to leave for home, the girl told Xiaofang that she must visit Liaocheng some day.

While watching their rehearsal in the courtyard, I asked, "Is it very difficult to learn acrobatics since it is so complicated?" Xu Jicheng did not answer my question but said, "Except for two of the children, all the family have life-long wounds." His daughter-in-law, Liu Airong, has hurt herself twice. Once she fell while performing the Flying Trapeze and lost consciousness for four days. However, the actress continued to practise and six months later, she reappeared on stage. Now I know that while smiling on stage, very often, they are actually suffering bad pains. At family gatherings the topic is always acrobatics. Even Qianqian always asks questions such as "What about my act? What pose should I use when I do my handstand?"

1. A table laden with medals and award certificates won by the Xu family
2. Each of the family has his or her special skill.
3. A photo of the Xu family taken in front of Xu Jicheng's house
4. The courtyard also serves as a practice ground.



WANG DAMIN AND HIS THEMATIC ACROBATICS

The recent development of acrobatics in Liaocheng is closely related to the efforts of Wang Damin, a scholarly director of the Liaocheng Acrobatics Troupe. Wang, 56, entered the acrobatics troupe at the age of 18 and has done a great deal of research and writing in the field of acrobatics. Among his publications are *Studies on a Hundred Plays*, and a TV play *Night Pearls* which depicts the lives of acrobats. He has also designed quite a few new acrobatic acts, one of which, *Flying Forks on Plum-Flower Posts*, won the Silver Lion Prize at the Third Wujiao International Acrobatics Festival. Wang believes that acrobatic performances should follow a script and that each act should have a theme. His own creation, *Having Fun at the Bottom of the Sea*, has set a good example for his advocating. Wang pays much attention to the theoretical study of acrobatics. Many of his essays have attracted much interest from acrobatic circles.

Wang maintains that using a script is a progression from the traditional acrobatic show, and that using a script makes it possible to create scores for music, dance and lighting. But, at the same time, he agrees there should be room for directors and performers to add in their own creativity.

Wang Damin told me that one of the many difficulties in creating and performing "theme acts" is the shortage of funds. For example, in some cases, they cannot afford to invite someone to compose special music for the act, therefore the performance cannot live up to their expectations.

When I asked if acrobatic shows would become plays with too much stress on scripts, Wang replied: "Of course not. Acrobatic performances are an art focusing on the skill of the acrobat while providing the audience with aesthetic perception and strength. A script only helps add a new attraction to the beauty of the performance with good scenes, new themes, beautiful music and so on." In fact Wang has revealed his theory in his series of creations, such as *Love Between the Jar and the Bowl*, *Laughing Restaurant* and *Having Fun at the Bottom of the Sea*, which have won prizes at either international or national art festivals.





RETIRED ACROBAT TEACHES BY FISHING POND

When I met with 67-year-old Liu Xilun, he was teaching martial arts to two boys by a fish pond. After the old artisan in Dong'e Town retired from the Shandong Acrobatics Troupe six years ago, he decided to return to his hometown. In order to kill time, he asked the village to let him take care of the local fish pond. Still feeling idle, he began to teach some village kids acrobatics. Watching the old man I heard him call out to the boys from time to time to correct their moves. Not without pride, Liu told me, "These kids really have talent. After a couple of years I will send them to an acrobatic troupe." To Liu, his coaching has a double meaning, as he said, "While I am teaching them, I am getting exercise for myself. That's why I am still fit, am I not?" I nodded in sincere admiration as he immediately made a martial art pose.

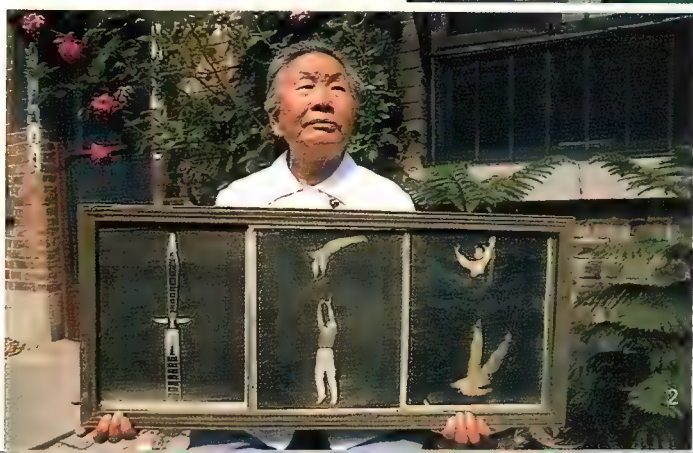


1. Wang Damin coaches his students.
2. Liu Xilun teaches by the fish pond.
3. Decorations in Liu Xilun's house.

RETIRED ACTRESS KEEPS PRACTISING

Zhang Yulan is a locally well-known acrobat. She became excited as we sat in her courtyard discussing acrobatics. The senior actress, at the age of 70, told me she continues to practise even to this day. Seeing that I was dubious, she lay down on her back and placed her granddaughter on her upturned feet. She then proceeded to juggle her grandchild. Zhang came from a family of acrobats. At the age of six, she herself could do somersaults and balance on top of a ladder held by her mother with the feet. Later she developed her own repertoire by learning to juggle different things with her feet.

Today, six of her eight children are involved in acrobatic performance. Her eldest daughter Wang Qiuxiang can balance on a high-wire while riding a cycle; her second daughter Qiufeng can bend over her back to pick up flowers with her mouth while balancing bowls on her head; her fourth daughter Qiuling can perform handstands, while her sixth and seventh daughters are both working with the Hohhot Acrobatic Troupe in Inner Mongolia, specialised in cycling on a high platform, balancing bowls, etc. Hers really is a family of acrobats.



1. Zhang Yulan juggling her granddaughter in her courtyard
2. Stage photos of Zhang Yulan
3. Meng Guanglian proudly showing the poster of his show, *Flying upon Grasses*
4. During a break: Meng Guanglian and his wife juggle corns to each other.

"FLYING UPON GRASSES"

I left Liaocheng and arrived, an hour later, at the county seat of Dong'e, the birth place of Liaocheng acrobatics. The name "Flying upon Grasses" is known by almost everybody in Dong'e, so it was not long before I found the home of the famous acrobat who was given this nickname, 64-year-old Meng Guanglian. His father Meng Jiqian was a celebrated acrobat well known in western Shandong during the early years of the 20th Century. Meng Guanglian began to learn acrobatics from his father when he was 10 years old. He quickly became a good horseman and also mastered cycling, walking on the high-wire and playing the clown. In the early 1950s, he became the main attraction of the local Sansheng Circus. His horsemanship was his forte which won him the nickname "Flying upon Grasses". He adopted some poses often used in Peking Opera into his performance and this made him a huge success. Meng could not help showing his pride when he mentioned that so far, no one has surpassed his horse-riding skills. He showed me a poster displaying his skill as a horseman in his earlier days, and proudly told me that he could still do some of the acts. His bowed legs are a legacy of his years spent on a horse.

In 1981 he travelled with his troupe to Beijing. At the age of almost 50 he was still full of energy and played "Lord Guan Playing Broad Sword on Horseback". Another act which requires great skill involved jumping into the saddle of his horse while it was galloping around the arena. The audience particularly liked this performance, especially when he repeatedly slipped under the horse,

followed by performing handstands on horseback. At the end of his act he would finish by making a beautiful somersault off the horse. While listening to him, I could visualise the breath-taking performance.

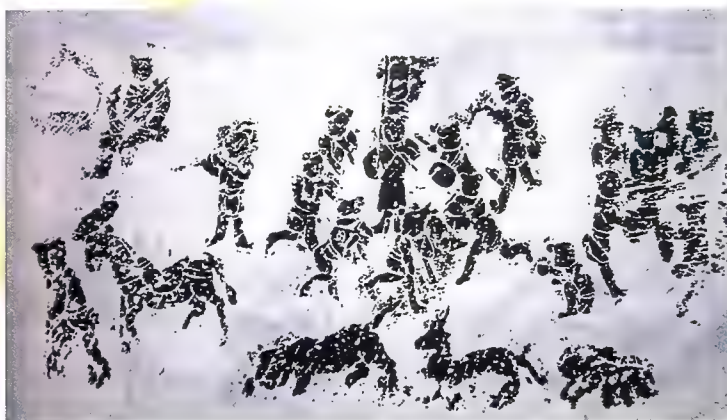
Meng's wife, Zhang Lianying, married him when she was 18, probably attracted by his boldness and wonderful performance. Soon after the wedding, she also began to learn the art of acrobatics and eventually became a good cyclist and horsewoman. Today, the couple live on Meng's pension of 600 yuan per month. They also farm three *mu* of land. Besides raising birds, chicken, sheep and rabbits, the old couple also go fishing. Obviously, they are living a happy and contented life.

Translated by M.Q.



LIAOCHENG, HOMETOWN OF ACROBATICS

Liaocheng's acrobatics goes back a long way.... According to historical records, forms of acrobatics were



An ancient stone carving depicting acrobatic performances

seen in China about 2,500 years ago. Archaeological findings, including clay figurines excavated from an ancient tomb belonging to the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 24), are proof of the art's history in Shandong Province where Liaocheng is located. The graceful figurines representing actors, musicians and on-lookers reveal the scale of acrobatic performances at that time.

During the Three Kingdom Period (220-280) one man by the name of Cao Zhi of the Wei State played an important role in the development of Liaocheng's acrobatics. Cao Zhi, son of the founder of State Wei, Cao Cao, was famous for his intelligence in literature, but his accomplishment in acrobatics was seldom noted. After he was granted the title of King of Chen and given the land of Dong'e in Liaocheng, he began to live an unconventional life and spent all his time drinking and entertaining his friends who came to Dong'e from all over the country. He spent many hours cock-fighting, juggling balls and displaying his skills of horsemanship. As a result, he became a master in all these things. Historical books say that Cao Zhi, arrogant by nature, often showed off his acrobatic skills before starting a conversation with his distinguished guests. Cao died at the age of 41 and was

buried in Dong'e. The tomb of Cao Zhi had been robbed several times, but in 1951 a colour stone ball was found inside, which was presumably the one he used for showing his juggling skills.

A song which was once popularly sung by performers of the Dongsheng Circus founded in 1919 in Dong'e reflects Cao Zhi's contribution to the art of acrobatics: "Horsemanship, pole-climbing, ball-juggling, water-meteors and the whip; to guarantee your safety while wandering from place to place

giving performance, you should first worship the man with the name of Cao Zhi."

Liaocheng artisans also have the tradition of worshipping Hua Zhenfang (called Ancestor Hua), who was probably the forefather of Liaocheng's acrobatics. Originally called *baixi* (a hundred performances), Liaocheng acrobatics prospered during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) when Hua Zhenfang's skills were at such a peak that he "performed in front of the imperial throne and climbed up the sword mountain outside Women Gate," as described in a local song.

The legacy of Liaocheng has been well carried on by the later generations of acrobats. Today, the acrobatic performing art has become so popular in Liaocheng that natives of Liaocheng are found in almost every troupe throughout China. Among those who have won international awards are Meng Zhaopeng, director and coach of "Balancing Benches", the "Golden Clown" prize winner of the tenth World Acrobatics Competition, and Meng Yan, winner of the "British Airways Cup" in the eleventh Britain World Acrobatics Competition.

Translated by M.Q.



Careful selection – Li Nan at work
(by Xie Guanghui)

LI NAN

Mr. Li Nan bears all the characteristics of a native of Shandong Province: tall of stature, honest, and an unwavering sense of perseverance. Ever since he became a photographer, Li has used his camera to capture subjects of interest. Among his well-known works are the photographs entitled *The Last Generation of Chinese Women with Bound Feet* and *A Welfare Centre for Children*. For this assignment he set off for Liaocheng to visit an acrobatics training school where children start learning the trade at a very young age. He stayed at the school for 10 days hoping to capture the children's life, but it took time and effort to become accepted by the children. Later, they warmly referred to him as "Uncle Li" and revealed their true faces to him. One of his photographic works, *Balancing Bowls on Head While Cycling*, won first prize in the category of art at the Global Journalistic Photography Competition held in the Netherlands.

TRAVELLERS' TIPS

Accommodation

Guanyue Hostel, standard room: 200 yuan
Dongchang Hostel, standard room: 200 yuan
Haiyuange Hotel, standard room: 360 yuan

Transport

Liaocheng can be reached by:
Beijing-Kowloon Railway;
direct bus from Jinan (about 20 yuan, 2 hours);
bus from Zhengzhou, Henan (10 hours);
or bus from Handan, Hebei (about 30 yuan, 4 hours)

Places to Visit

It takes 5 minutes to walk from Guanyue Tower in the old city to the acrobatics training school. During the yearly Shandong Autumn Commodities Fair (October–December), acrobatic performances are given in every county and district in Liaocheng.

Other Attractions

The area features 28 major historical spots and places depicted in Chinese classic novels such as the *Tales of the Marshes*, *Golden Jar for Plums* and *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio*. Organised tours based on *Tales of the Marshes* are popular with tourists.

Shopping

Figurines, wood block carvings, carved gourds, paint-brushes and belts made of ox.

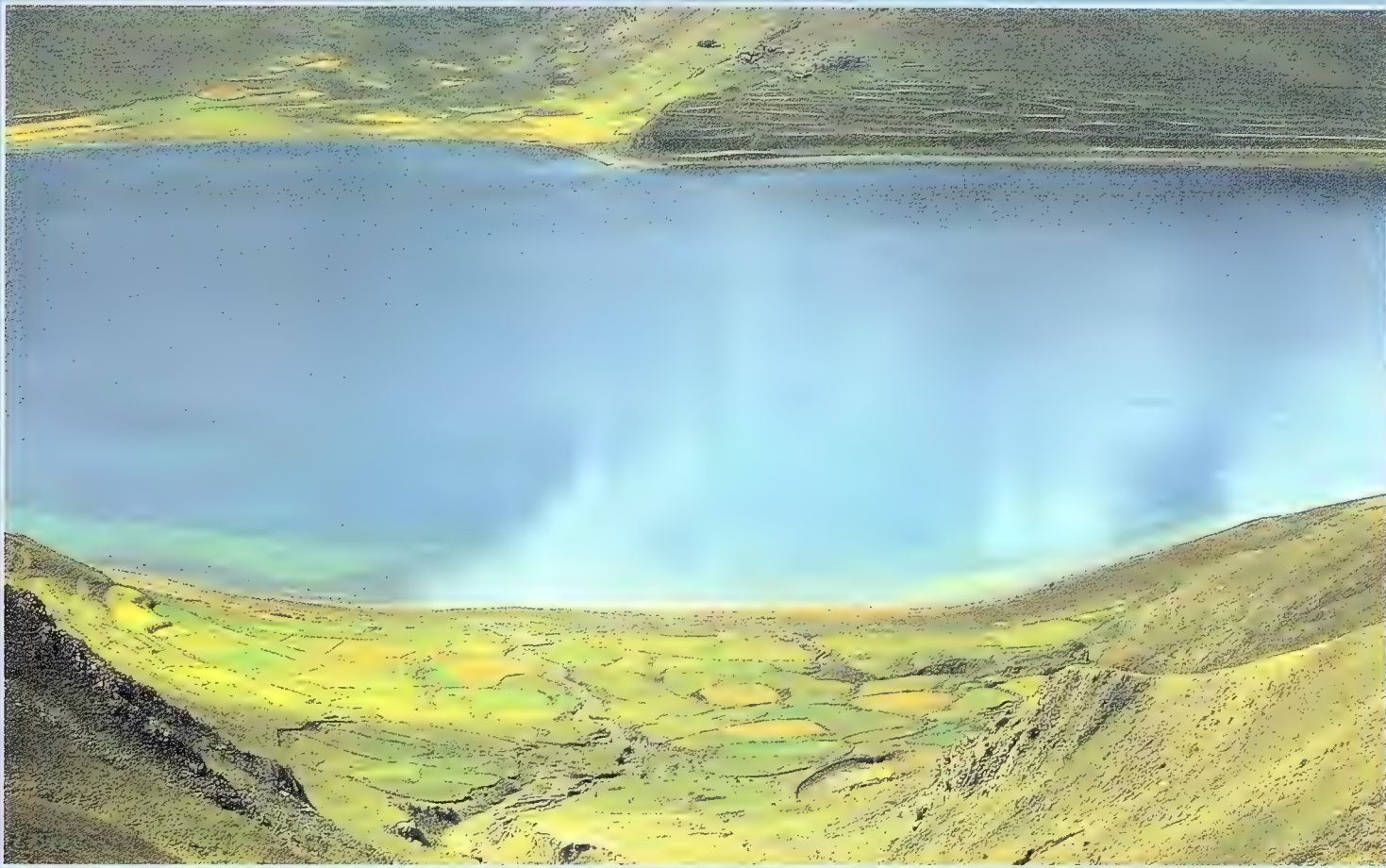
Delicacies

Beef cooked in Western-Shandong style, red dates, Wei family's smoked chicken, Meng family's stuffed buns, and various local fruits and melons.



EIGHTY DAYS AROUND THE SACRED YAMZHO YUM LAKE

Photos & Article by Huang Yanhong



Last June I joined a scientific exploration team on a field study to Yamzho Yum Lake in Tibet organised by several scientific institutions. The purpose was to gather basic facts about the lake's ecological environment, and its geological and hydrometeorological conditions.

As soon as the plane touched down in Lhasa, capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region, Mr. Peng, who had already been to Tibet seven times, advised us: "Get plenty of sleep and rest, and make sure you don't catch

a cold. Take the first day off so that you can get accustomed to the altitude." The next morning, we found ourselves in good shape and in high spirits, so we set off for Yamzho Yum Lake and began our 80-day field study. Remembering the novel by Jules Verne, *Around the World in Eighty Days*, I was sure my trip would be fraught with difficulties but overall it would prove to be rewarding and interesting.

Source of Fairy Tales and Science

As a highland barrier lake, Yamzho Yum

was formed some 400 million years ago when glaciers and landslides blocked the path of a river to create a lake covering an area of 630 square kilometres (1/10 times the size of the beautiful West Lake in Hangzhou). The lake lies 4,500 metres above sea level and contains 115 billion cubic metres of water.

In Tibetan, Yamzho Yum means green jade. According to an ancient local legend, a fairy came to this barren land and threw down a piece of green jade that she had been carrying. Immediately a lake appeared. The

the lake's water level is about 100 feet below the surrounding land.

Kreamlike Shaped Lake

At the northern end of the lake, the water is a milky white color. This is because of the high concentration of calcium carbonate in the water.

The lake is a natural wonder. The water is so clear that you can see the bottom of the lake. The water is also so warm that you can swim in it. The lake is a natural wonder.

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Caught in a Hell Storm

The lake is a natural wonder.

1. The lake is a natural wonder.
2. The lake is a natural wonder.



1

the river. How clumsy and awkward we must have looked!

Studying a glacier is no easy job. There was no road and so we had to crawl. Just then a hail storm descended, throwing ice balls at our face and head. We ran to some nearby caves for shelter. Since they were too small to offer us total shelter, we could only protect our heads by sticking them inside the caves, leaving our backs exposed to the mercy of the storm. You can just picture the sorrowful state we were in.

Ten minutes later, the sky cleared up and we continued with our assignment. Regretfully, we saw none of the wild hogs that the region is famous for. Gaisang had the most fruitful trip: he collected a bag full of snow lotus.

A Risky Moment on the Lake

To cruise across the mighty lake in a motorboat seems an exciting notion, but it is not without its dangers.

One afternoon, five of us were out on the lake when the weather suddenly turned very nasty, we barely managed to wrap up our instruments before the heavy rains poured down. In no time at all we were soaked through. Even more dangerous were the fierce waves that the wind whipped up. The boat almost capsized several times. All we could do was to hold on tightly to the boat and

pray. Luckily, our captain was an experienced sailor and we headed back to shore in a zigzag path to prevent being overturned by the high waves. By the time we reached the shore darkness had fallen. Our cotton-padded coats were soaked through and weighed a ton — we couldn't wait to peel them off. With the help of other team members who had come to meet us we carried the boat onto a truck. Some of us had to squeeze into the boat because there was not enough room inside the truck. As we returned to base, the boat rocked and bounced and I was afraid that it might be catapulted into the air at any moment, carrying its passengers with it.

That evening, the team leader declared tomorrow day of rest, since half of the team had caught a cold.

The Birds!

During our field studies around the lake, we often saw a kind of grey-white bird. We found out later that they were sand gulls, a particularly hardy species of sea gull. Often seen just before a rainstorm, they hover above

the lake, screeching in high-pitched tones.

Watching them catch fish is most interesting, particularly if you have a telescope. Sand gulls, having detected their prey, stop and position themselves just above the water, flapping their wings vigorously.

Bending their red beaks 70 to 80 degrees, they suddenly dive into the water at lightning speed, then resurface and fly away with the catch in their beak....

One day we came across an injured gull floating on the water. We drove our motorboat over. Hoping to bring the injured bird on board, Mr. Peng raised an oar to reach it. Just then we heard the loudest screeching overhead. I looked up and saw thousands of sand gulls hovering above us. They stared menacingly down at us, as if they were ready to do battle, with some bold ones aiming their beaks at Mr. Peng. Recalling the skill with which they caught fish and knowing well the consequences, we turned around and sped away from the site of the injured bird as fast



2

as our motor boat could carry us. Long after the danger was over, we joked with each other saying, "We were lucky to get away so quickly, or else the birds would have descended upon us and we would all have become as bald as Mr. Peng!"

Joined by Five Swiss Specialists

Together with a team of five Swiss scientists we went to study the water source of the lake 5,000 metres above sea level. After driving for several dozen kilometres, we came to an even more beautiful highland lake called Bomo. In Tibetan, the name means "little girl", however, when our Swiss colleagues asked us what Bomo meant, we decided to translate it into "fairy" as the real name seemed too ordinary for the charming lake. However, we found the lake to be more enchanting than even the word "fairy" could suggest.

Unfortunately, one of the Swiss team had to return to camp because of high-altitude sickness.

Near the lake we came across a village which was obviously isolated from the outside world. The villagers stared at us as if encountering extra-terrestrials, especially the foreign team members. The area also contained a hydrometeorology station managed by four young men. When asked how they occupied their time throughout the year, they told us: "Disco dancing by the lake side to the sound of a tape recorder!"

We stopped for lunch by the lake and when we finished the Swiss scientists carefully put all the empty cans and other rubbish into a plastic bag. Touched that they should take such care for the environment of a foreign land we all did likewise.

A Fish Harvest

The area around Yamzho Yum Lake is abundant with wildlife. On the grasslands in

the snow mountains 5,000 metres above sea level, wild hogs are often spotted, as are wild goats and foxes. The islets in the river are a sanctuary for wild ducks and swans, however there are also tales about a monster living in the lake! According to the description of one eye-witness, the monster is similar to the one living in Loch Ness in Scotland. Perhaps all water monsters in the world look alike! But, for sure, one species is found in the largest number — none other than the fish. At Baidi, we came across a fishing team whose captain told us that the team was set up in the 1950s and was one of the oldest fishing teams in Tibet. He recalled that the resource is so plentiful that during the summer each net cast could bring in a haul of half a ton of fish. Because transportation is a problem, most of their catch is dried and later sold.

One day, we came to a branch lake called

Yese. Of high scientific value, the lake flows into both the Yamzho Yum Lake and the Yarlung Zangbo River. Noon came and someone suggested we have a picnic. We all set to work. Some washed rice, others prepared the kerosene stove, while Mr. Peng and I went to catch the fish. We came to a small stream about a foot

deep. As soon as we stepped into the water, we felt the fish around our legs. Nonetheless they were very slippery and difficult to catch with our bare hands. However, we quickly learned the trick and began throwing them onto the grass bank. The method proved very effective and in about 10 minutes we returned with a whole bucket full of fish. It proved to be the most memorable meal of my life: a pot of tasty lake fish soup set in the beautiful surroundings of the lake.

A Lost Temple

Yamzho Yum Lake and Nam Lake in northern Tibet and the Mopam Lake in Ali

1. Qianyang Glacier has drawn many scientific researchers since 1970s.

2. The tractor is the local means of transport.

3. The vestige of a castle at Tela





1

region are known as the three major sacred lakes of Tibet. Here at Yamzho Yum, the religious atmosphere is very strong. Apart from Mani stones, coloured pennants printed with scriptures are found fluttering everywhere in the mountains, on aged trees, on rooftops and even in the lake.

There are also many temples at Yamzho Yum. One day, we were studying the eco-environment on one of the small islets on the lake and found on the map its name — Yoinpudo Gunba. "Gunba" in Tibetan means "temple". We realised there must be one on the island and true to our expectations, our eyes were greeted by a series of broken temple walls. Gaisang told us that the temple had a very long history but was ruined during the Cultural Revolution in 1960s.

We took a few photos in front of the remains and were about to depart, when we discovered a mountain cave. Mr. Peng led us into it. The cave was deep and after walking a dozen metres or so, it became pitch black. Fortunately, there were smokers in our party and aided by the glow of the cigarette lighters we moved on. Suddenly, Mr. Gan gave an excited cry. He had found a pigeon's nest containing more than 10 eggs, but even more interestingly, by the nest was a heap of "treasures". We carefully examined our find: scripture books, colourful Buddha statues and various copper wares used in temples. Gaisang said: "These things must have been hidden when the temple was brought down." In order not to offend the sacred spirit, we left the things as we had found them.

Sea of Flowers

The water in the lake was enticingly clear. We stopped the boat to take some water

samples, even when the sample bottle reached over a dozen metres below the water, it could still be seen clearly. We could not help admiring the lake once again.

As we approached Kongra Lake, we began to see a sea of wild flowers on Kongra Island in various colours and shapes. It was

amazing how nature had brought so many beautiful flowers to an island 4,500 metres above sea level. We went about gathering the flowers, and then sorted them to find there were 28 different species.

Mist-Shrouded Zhamalong

Before we realised it, 80 days had already passed since we came to Yamzho



2



西藏羊卓雍湖示意图
Sketch Map of Yamzho Yum Lake

3

Yum Lake. On the day of our departure, we set out from Nagarze, passing through Baidi. Entering Zhamalong Lake area we were just in time to see a thin white mist curling up from a distant mountain path. Only several metres wide, we soon drove through it and, turning round, I found the mist was like a white screen drawing itself out of the mountain path. It drifted along the lake surface to the opposite side. I could not believe what I had just seen. Ten minutes later when I looked down at the lake from a mountain slope, the white screen had stretched to several hundred metres wide to reach the opposite bank. It did not disperse until some time later.

What had created such a wonderful phenomenon? Most people were of the opinion that it had something to do with the heat underneath Yamzho Yum Lake. For example, at Baidi not far away, there is a lake which does not freeze in winter.

Unfortunately, I was so excited that I forgot to take some photos when the mist was at its most impressive. Still, I am grateful

to Yamzho Yum for letting us witness this amazing sight as a final parting gift.

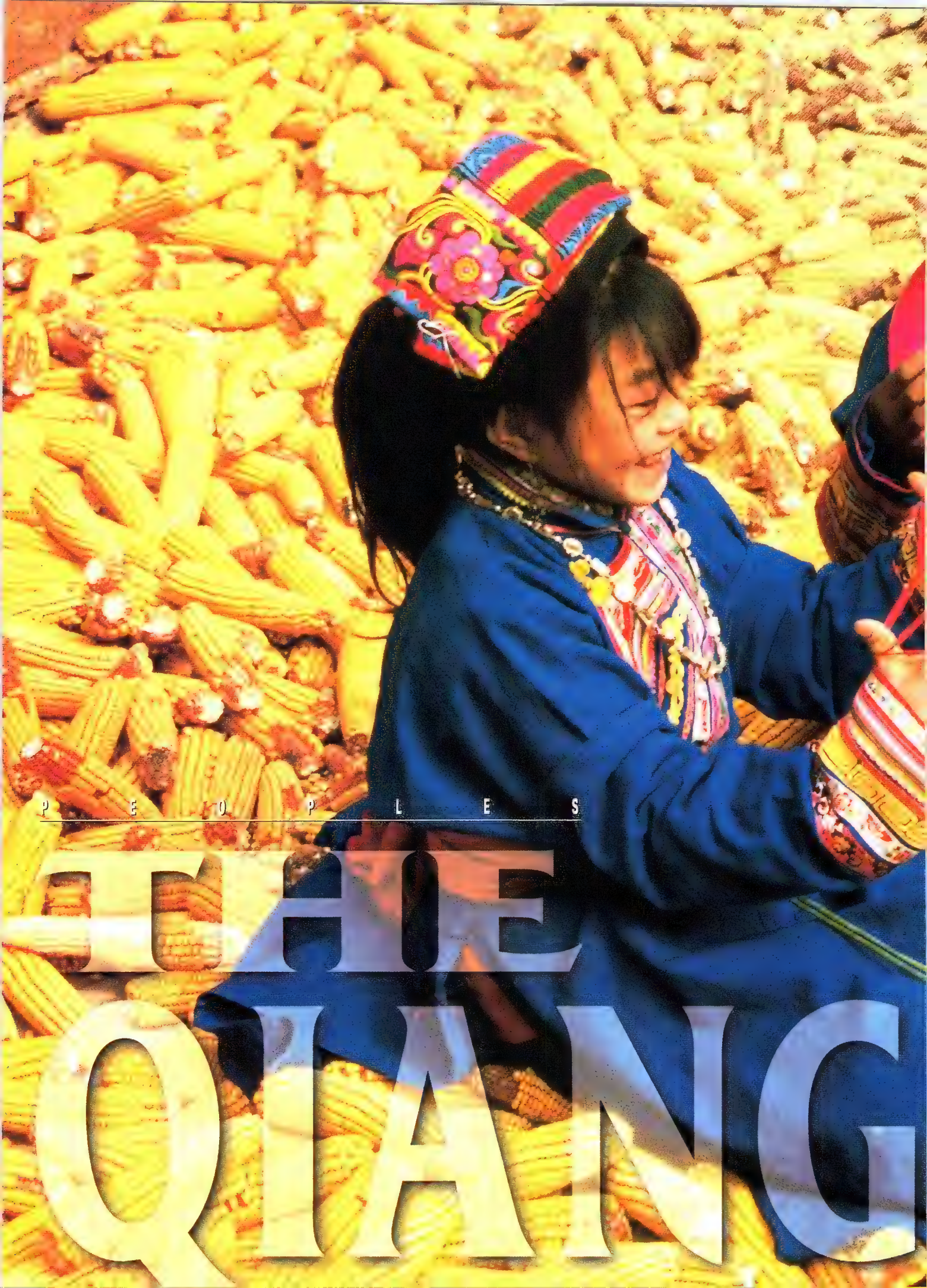
Translated by F. Huang



4

Useful Tips: To get to Yamzho Yum Lake, set off from Lhasa heading for Quxu along the Lhasa River. Then drive along the Yarlung Zangbo River to the foot of Gambala Mountain. Crossing the mountain, pass Zhamalong and Baidi before arriving in Nagarze County — allow half a day's drive. A hostel provides sparse accommodation. A vehicle is compulsory.

1. Picnicking on the shore of Yamzho Yum Lake
2. Surveying the small islet Yoinpudo Gunba in the lake
3. Dawn at the lake
4. It is men's job to make the soles of shoes.



P E O P L E S

THE QIANG



PEOPLE



A Qiang village teacher, Sichuan (by Ge Jialin)



Qiang women drinking wine (by Ge Jialin)

The Qiangs are an ancient ethnic minority with a history deeply rooted in the Xia Dynasty (circa 21st-16th centuries B.C.), believed to be the first of China's dynasties. During the Eastern Zhou period (770-221 B.C.) the Qiang people began to move to the Central Plains of China where they mixed with other ethnic groups and the Hans. Over time, only those who chose to live in their own, compact communities along the upper reaches of the Minjiang River or north-west Sichuan still retain their distinct characteristics. Today, the Qiang population stands at around 100,000. They mostly live in the counties of Maowen, Wenchuan and Heshui of Aba Prefecture in Sichuan Province. The Qiangs have their own language but those who live along transportation routes leading to settlements belonging to the Han Chinese also understand Mandarin.

In the past two decades, areas where the Qiang people reside have seen rapid development in industrial and agricultural production. In addition, tanning, paper-making and power industries have emerged, thereby improving the overall living standards of the Qiang people. For example, electricity has reached every doorsteps so that the era in which the whole region of the Qiangs relied solely on torch light has gone forever.

Food

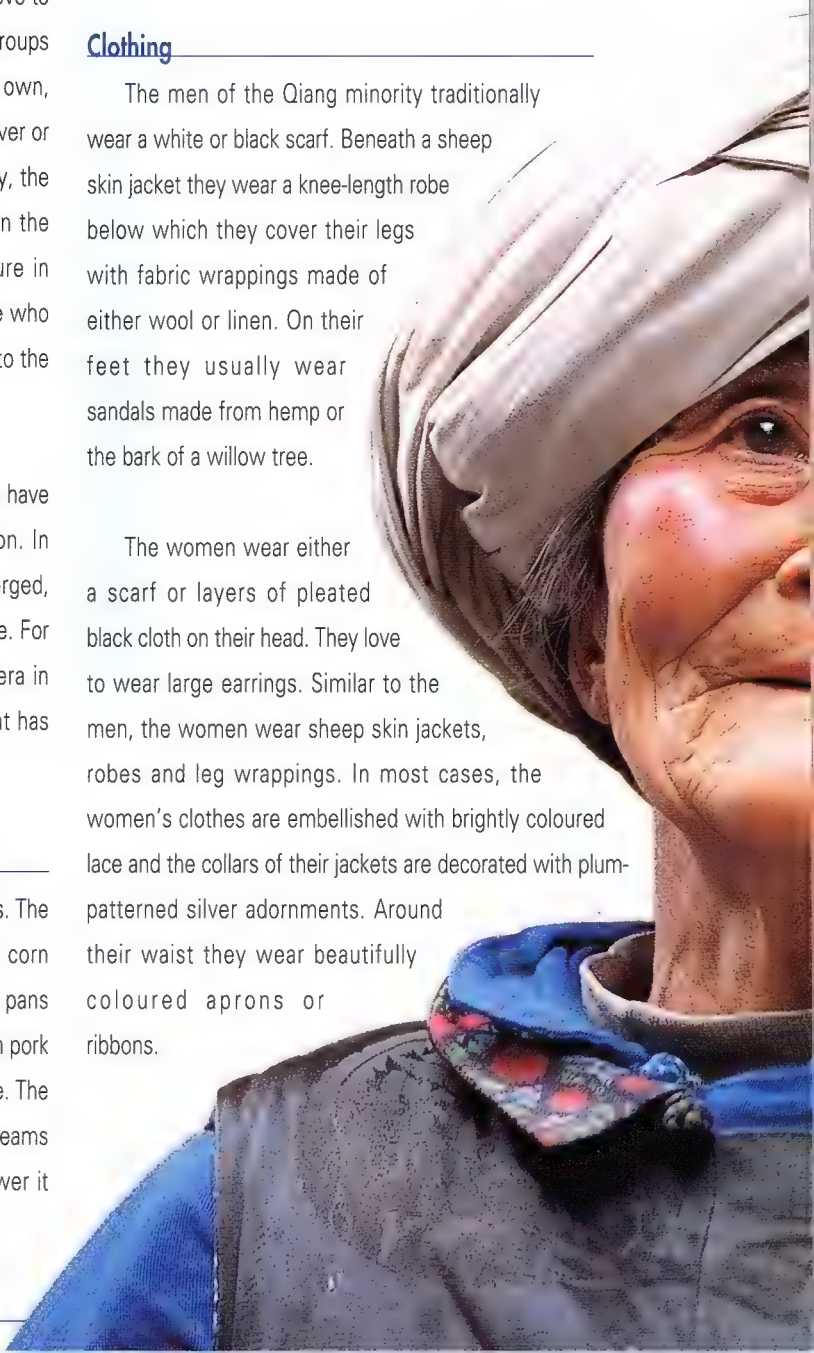
Rice, corn and *qingke* barley form the staple diet of the Qiangs. The most common dish is a soup made of vegetables mixed with corn porridge. They also make corn bread; the dough is placed in flat pans and then baked in the ashes of a fire. The Qiangs seldom eat fresh pork and prefer to dry all their meat in order to preserve its storage time. The pork is cut into small pieces and then air-dried hanging from the beams of their house. The longer the pork is preserved and the yellower it

becomes, the better it is believed to taste. There are other specialities such as buckwheat bread, "steamed wine" and a soup made with a local kind of sauerkraut.

Clothing

The men of the Qiang minority traditionally wear a white or black scarf. Beneath a sheep skin jacket they wear a knee-length robe below which they cover their legs with fabric wrappings made of either wool or linen. On their feet they usually wear sandals made from hemp or the bark of a willow tree.

The women wear either a scarf or layers of pleated black cloth on their head. They love to wear large earrings. Similar to the men, the women wear sheep skin jackets, robes and leg wrappings. In most cases, the women's clothes are embellished with brightly coloured lace and the collars of their jackets are decorated with plum-patterned silver adornments. Around their waist they wear beautifully coloured aprons or ribbons.





Preserved pork is much favoured by Qiang people. (by Zhang Jinneng)



Students (by Ge Jialin)

Their shoes are also a local handicraft.

Called "cloud shoes" because of the colourful cloud patterns embroidered on the upper, their shape resembles a small boat with the toe of the slipper tilting upwards.

Dwellings

Since ancient times, the Qiangs have always lived in either three-storey houses or fortress-like towers, both made of stone. The upper storey of the three-storey houses, serves as a warehouse, the middle storey contains the living quarters while the lower storey is reserved for their live-stock. A fireplace is built in the centre of the middle floor and is kept burning all year round.

The fortress-like towers usually stand more than 30 metres high and are square, hexagonal or octagonal in shape. They consist of between six to 14 storeys with embrasures on each side.

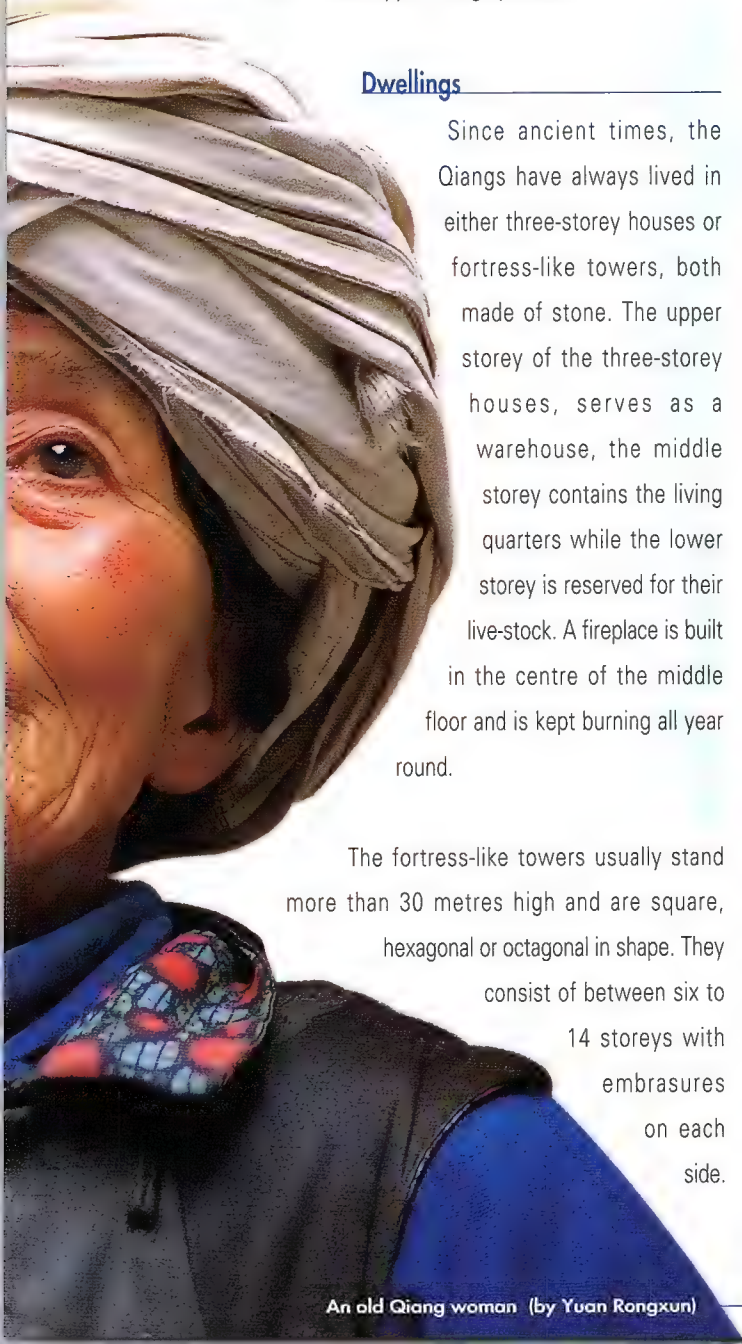
Marriage

In most cases marriages are pre-arranged by the parents with engagements often taking place during childhood. Usually, the wife is older than her husband, however, the reverse does occur when a man moves in with his wife's family. Throughout the engagement, right up until the day of the wedding, the man's family spends huge amounts of money on gifts for his bride-to-be's family and on wedding feasts.

On the first day of marriage, called "flower night", the bride's family holds a banquet followed by drinking and dancing which continues well into the night. The next day, the bride arrives at her husband's home. After a solemn welcoming ceremony, the bride and bridegroom enter their nuptial chamber. The bridegroom's family then holds a banquet for all the invited guests. That evening, drinking, dancing and singing are the order of the day. Three days later, the bridegroom accompanies his wife to visit her parents and they are treated to a banquet by the bride's female friends. It is also an occasion for the girls to tease and make fun of the bridegroom.

Festivities

The first day of the 10th month in the lunar calendar is New Year's Day for the Qiangs, but they can celebrate it only when there has not been a death in the family during the past year. Otherwise only the Spring Festival can be celebrated. During New Year celebrations, people stop working in order to make sacrificial offerings made from dough in the shape of small oxen and sheep — these are presented to



An old Qiang woman (by Yuan Rongxun)



A Qiang village in Lixian County, Sichuan (by Zhang Jinneng)



A sorcerer in Yonghe Township, Lixian County (by Zhang Jinneng)

their ancestors and the gods. The most traditional New Year musical custom is for the host to sing a ballad with a guest, known as "wine singing", to the accompaniment of dancing. Together, the hosts and guests sing, dance and drink well into the night.

Most of the Qiang festivities are centred around farming and religion. The most important festival is the "mountain sacrifice" — ceremonial sacrifices are offered to the mountain god in prayer for a good harvest and safety. Normally, "mountain sacrifice" ceremonies are held by individual villages and only male members participate. Boys who take part in the ceremony for the first time (at the age of 12) have to bring a knife and wine as offerings.

During the New Year celebration, the traditional sport of "pole pushing" is held as a competition. Whoever succeeds first in pushing a pole across the line drawn between the two teams is declared the winner.

Religious beliefs

Since they could not explain many of the natural phenomena, ancient Qiangs felt very insecure with the threat of natural calamities. They thus developed the worship of nature based on the concept that "every natural element has a spirit". Their first and foremost god is the Sun or "heavenly god", which is believed to preside over all things. Next they worship the spirits of mountains, fire, trees, sheep, water, land and white stones, altogether more than a dozen different kinds. In

addition, each village has its own local god, including the *yin* god, the *yang* god and the *zheng* god. Even the fortresses have their "fortress god". Moreover, Qiang



"Yun yu shoes" made by Qiang women (Wang Dajun)



A house built of stone belonging to the Qiang people (by Yuan Rongxun)



Brick towers erected in the Qiang village (by Ge Jialin)

families have their family gods. The worshipping of their ancestors bears, to a large extent, the imprint of the Han influence.

People who have performed meritorious deeds or ethnic heroes are also worshipped by the Qiangs and so they have god of mason, god of blacksmith and so on.

A *Duangong*, or sorcerer, is a part-time priest and the link between the Qiang people and ghosts and gods. Also engaged in productive labour, he has to be able to recite many fairy tales, be well-versed in the history of the Qiangs, be equipped with a whole series of religious objects that can "perform magic and communicate with the gods", and understand medicine. He is therefore highly respected by ordinary people. The *Duangong* is trained through a master-apprentice system, and as there is no written scripture, all religious spells are handed down verbally.

TRAVELLERS' TIPS

To visit a Qiang village, travellers have to first go to Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province. From there, one can take a bus running between Ximen Station in Chengdu and Maerkang. Along the highway between Wenchuan and Lixian, and between Wenchuan and Maoxian counties, Qiang houses and fortress towers can be seen on the mountain slopes. It takes about half a day to reach the area from Chengdu.

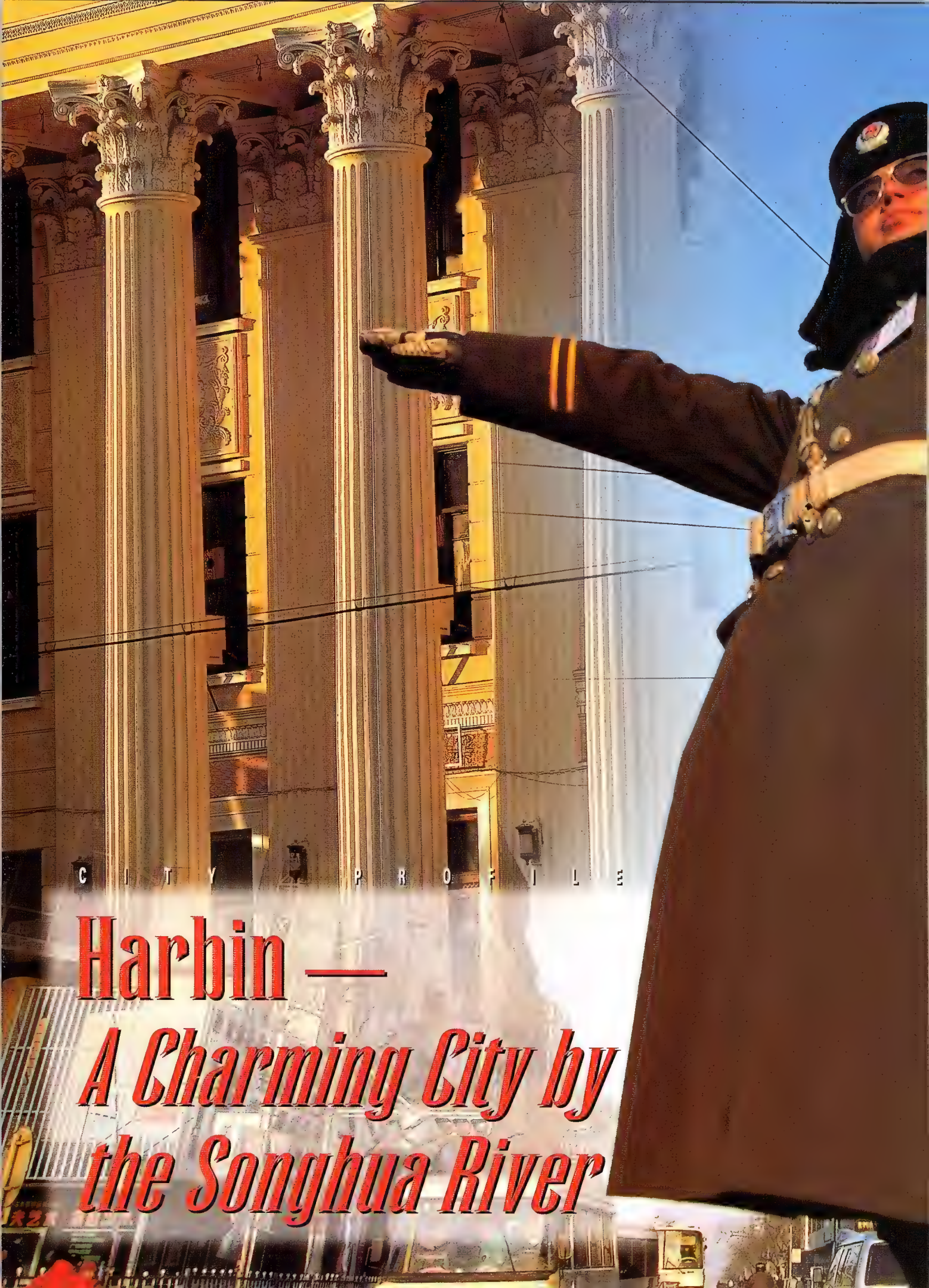
Photos by Ge Jialin & Zhang Jinneng

Article by Huang Yanhong

Translated by F. Huang



The white stone worshipped by the Qiangs living in Wenchuan Village (by Zhang Jinneng)



C I T Y P R O F I L E

Harbin — *A Charming City by the Songhua River*





Harbin, the capital of China's farthest north-eastern province Heilongjiang, is one of China's important industrial bases. Located at the banks of Songhua River, the 6,926-square-kilometre city has a population of approximately 3.8 million. Technology and light industries are the pillars of the city's economy. Yet the things which the city can be proud of are not limited to its industrial and economic development – Harbin is also a city notable for its culture and history.

Strolling through central Harbin, one can find neat sectors of modern constructions (mainly factories, offices and exhibition centres) interspersed with a splendid medley of architecture: Gothic and Baroque style chapels, Russian Orthodox churches and dachas, Catholic cathedrals, Buddhist and Confucius temples and spacious parks embellished with meticulously designed horticulture.... Harbin looks like a city in Eastern Europe and has been called "Moscow in the East".

This mix of classic and modern, east and west, is not confined to the city's appearance but is also reflected by the life style of the people and their cultural activities. The locals' love of beer reminds one of the Germans; during the holidays an integral part of family life is to flock from the city proper to the countryside with an enthusiasm for nature; in summer they like to picnic in the woods or on Sun Island, or bathe in the Songhua River. The women of Harbin are aware of fashion trends, and a new design spotted on television or at the movies becomes popular in no time. In July every year, large audiences are attracted to the wide repertoire of musicians and singers from home and abroad at Harbin's Summer Concert. In winter when the rivers and lakes become frozen, people of Harbin begin to indulge

themselves in a wide variety of winter sports (ice-skating, wind sailing, swimming in pools dug out from an iced-over lake, ice-hockey, etc.) with as much zeal as the Swiss have for skiing and the Canadians have for ice-hockey.

Nevertheless, the thing which makes Harbin people stand out is their character; their frankness, honesty and steadfastness, coupled with their tall stature and fair skin make them the Nordics of the East. Although proud of their history, they have a modern outlook on life – they are always striving forward with an iron will. They have been working hard within this century to develop Harbin into one of China's most important industrial bases. Under the spur of the reform programme launched more than a decade ago, the city has made great progress and ranks 13th out of 50 of the most advanced cities in China in terms of economic strength and industrial development.

An Important Industrial Base

Harbin's bountiful natural resources such as wood, minerals, oil, coal and cereals enable the healthy development of the processing industry. Machinery, electrical and electronic products, pharmaceuticals, chemicals and food stuffs are the mainstay of the city's economy. Its well-developed transportation network has made it a traffic hub between Europe and the Far East for rail and air, as well as a successful entrepot. Direct flights from Harbin reach other major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenyang, Xi'an and Urumqi in China, and Khabarovsk in Russia. A well-developed network of highways connect the city with other major cities, including Beijing, Shenyang and Tianjin. Its advanced telecommunications,

1. A Russian expatriate in Harbin
2. A street scene reminiscent of cities in Eastern Europe
3. Gloria Inn by the bank of Songhua River
4. The largest number of steam locomotives in China are found in Harbin.





3

capacious power generating system and comprehensive infrastructure also meet the city's requirements for its economic development. Over the past few years, tourism is emerging as another of the city's major sources of revenue. The year 1996 saw the number of visitors grow by 34.1 per cent when compared with 1995. Tourist spots have received a face-lift thanks to investments used to upgrade and develop tourist resources in order to cope with the expanding market.

In the field of technology, the backbone of Harbin's economy, a number of state enterprises have applied new market strategies which have already seen results. Harbin Aeroplane Manufacturer, for example, has been able to export transport planes for civil use for the first time following the staff training in France and the United States. Another success is the introduction into the domestic market of an innovative model of a mini-vehicle which was the result of a transfer of advanced technology from a renowned Japanese company (the model is also exported to Syria). The sale earned the state enterprise 1.8 billion yuan (about US\$230 million).

International enterprises and multi-nationals (among them the Coca Cola Corporation) are also beginning to flex their muscles in the promising investment environment. By 1993, 1283 Chinese-foreign joint ventures, Chinese-foreign co-operative enterprises and solely foreign-owned enterprises were approved to operate and 512 of them had already been operating. Foreign investors can enjoy the benefits of preferential policies offered in coastal open economic zones, national level strategic economic zones and high technology industry development zones. The annually held



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1. A modern shopping arcade
2. Eastern beauty draped in fur



Commerce and Trade Conference in Harbin provides prospective investors with an opportunity to become better informed about opportunities to find business partners and to make contact with the relevant authorities.

History and Legacy

Situated in the far-flung north-eastern corner of China, this cool, yet energetic city exudes historical charm. Since the 1930s, hundreds of archaeological finds have revealed human settlements dating back to as early as the Old Stone Age. Historical records show that ancestors of the Manchus, one of the ethnic groups of northern China, already lived in Harbin 3,000 years ago and established ties with the Western Zhou Dynasty (11th century- 771 B.C.) of the central plains of China. In 1115, a branch of the tribe called Nüzhen unified the northern tribes after more than a hundred years of war and established the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234). Alejin Village (meaning "glory" in Nüzhen language and pronounced "Harbin" in the Han language) became the residence of the royal family and evolved into a city of considerable size. The prototype of a city-state began to take shape.

In the mid-Qing Dynasty, large numbers of Manchus and Hans moved into Harbin to engage in agriculture and fishery in response to a decree from the imperial court to develop virgin land. By the end of the 19th century, villages emerged – their economic mainstays were handicrafts and commerce. The population of Harbin swelled to 50,000 and a city, in the modern sense of the word, began to emerge.

In 1896, the Russian Tsarist empire exacted the right to build the Eastern Qing Railway (later renamed the Chinese Eastern Railway) in Harbin under the unequal "Sino-Russian Secret Treaty".

Under the Anglo-Russian Agreement signed in 1914 the Russian autonomous privileges were confirmed in the areas under the jurisdiction of the Chinese Eastern Railway administration in Harbin. The same privileges were also extended to the British. Thereafter, other powers such as France, Italy, Japan and the United States of America also rushed in to scramble for the same rights and asserted their influence in the city. From then on, more than a hundred thousand expatriates from more than 30 countries in Europe, North America and Asia flooded into Harbin and set up thousands of enterprises engaged in industry, commerce and finance. Sixteen countries established consulates here, and direct trade links were forged with such cities as Tokyo, Osaka, London, Paris, Berlin and New York. It was this episode in history which left behind Harbin's rich architectural legacy, with a heavy Russian flavour.

In the 1920s, China gradually regained control over the city. Nevertheless the people were subjected to the oppressive rule of the warlords. The 1930s saw the inhabitants get kicked out of the frying pan into the fire as the city was trodden on by the iron hooves of Japanese militarism. Two general strikes by tram workers and an underground resistance by partisans were launched against the Japanese invaders. From 1932 to 1944, about 67,000 people were persecuted by the Japanese invaders; others who were tortured to death without trial far exceeded that number.

After the founding of The People's Republic of China, Harbin became the hub of politics, economy and culture in Northeastern China and was the military supply base for the Chinese

People's Volunteer Army during the Korean War.

A Trade Centre in Northeast Asia

In the 1980s, Harbin restored its links to the outside world by establishing ties with cities in Canada, Germany, Denmark, France, the United States of America, Korea and Japan. Today, the city has also become a "northern gateway" for trade and technological exchanges with Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), particularly Russia. The annually held Harbin Trade Exhibition which is aimed at promoting trade with the CIS and Eastern Europe has drawn numerous exhibitors from the CIS, Europe, the United States of America, Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Meanwhile the Harbin Economic and Technological Development Zone has entered a co-operative relationship with Nachodka Free Economic Zone in Russia. In fact, at civilian level, since the late 1980s, there has been an influx of Russians into the city to trade or to work. In an effort to prepare itself for future development, the Municipal Government of Harbin organised the Economic and Technological Exchange Conference in Guangzhou in November of 1996 in order to learn how to better handle foreign trade from the more mature coastal city. Working hard to build ties with cities and regions at home and abroad, Harbin is set on becoming an important trade centre in north-eastern Asia at the turn of the next century.



1. A choir singing at a Catholic church
2. Main streets in Nangang District





TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

As a city endowed with spacious countryside, Harbin has a rich variety of scenic spots and historical sites and offers the visitor a choice of cultural activities and country sports. However, due to the variance of the city's climate, the choice of activities available will depend on the season in which one is visiting the city.

1. Scenic spots and historical sites

Stroll in the city

The city is a perfect marriage of nature and urban construction. The beauty of the city lies in the impressive architecture one sees. Part of Harbin's rich historical legacy, eastern- and western-style buildings are represented: Buddhist and Confucian temples, Greco-Roman and baroque buildings, Russian dachas, Gothic and Byzantine churches, etc.

Cruise along Songhua River

Harbin city proper is built along a section of the Songhua River and so another way to see the city is to take a cruise down the river to enjoy the riparian view of the city.

Sun Island

Situated on Songhua River is the 3,800-hectare Sun Island. It is a famous summer resort containing an artificial lake, forested area, hunting grounds and parks. Chinese and European style restaurants and villas are also on the island. Another attraction is a large fenced off area reserved for 30 North-East Tigers (the largest of all the tigers). Summer and Winter bestow the island with beautiful scenery of green and white.

Stalin Park

Located on the south bank of Songhua River, this park is built along a dam. Characteristics of the park are its Western-style garden and classic Russian architecture. In summer, it is an ideal place to escape from the heat of the city; in winter, popular sports are ice-sailing, ice-hockey, skating and sleighing on the iced-over Songhua River.

1. International Ice Carving Competition
2. Enjoying Russian dishes served at Huamei Western Restaurant



General Li Zhaolin Park

Built in the beginning of this century and later named in memory of the general who fought against the Japanese invaders in World War II (the general's tomb is situated here), the park of exuberant plants covers an area of 74,000 square metres and houses a variety of flowers, birds and fish. It is also the venue of the annual Ice Lantern Festival held in winter.

City Zoo

Formerly an experimental forest farm, this zoo is one of

the biggest of its kind in China. On display are more than 180 species of rare or exotic animals to be found in the province (among them are the north-east tigers, dappled deer, marten, wolverine, pandas, red-crowned crane and swan).

Shangjing Relics of the Jin Dynasty

The area surrounding Harbin is the birthplace of the Manchus. Lying 30 km south-east of Harbin city proper is Baishu Village of Acheng County, the capital of Jin Dynasty (1115-1234) and the ruins of the Shangjing Huining Palace of Nüzhen people (the forbears of the Manchus). The foundations of the palace are clearly discernible. Also found at the site are the tomb of the first emperor of the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234), a sacrificial altar, a smeltery, unearthed treasures and handicrafts, ancient look-out posts and post roads.

Jin Tombs

Discovered in Xiangfang District in 1982 is the Jin structures built on top of the burial sites in order to worship their ancestors. They are the first of their kind to be found in Heilongjiang Province. More than 200 artefacts such as utensils made of gold, silver, copper, iron, jade, pottery and agate have been excavated here. All of them show the level of workmanship of the Jin Dynasty and are precious pieces enabling researchers to further their studies on the culture of the Nüzhen people.

The Songhua River

Flowing west to east, to the north of the city proper, Songhua River is a popular bathing spot in summer. Water temperatures can reach 24°C–26°C in July and August. One can also picnic and sunbathe on the beaches along the river. When winter sets in, the frozen river becomes an ideal ground for winter sports such as ice hockey, sleighing, figure skating, speed skating and skiing.

Children's Railway

The 2-kilometre-long children's railway inside the Children's Park, Nangang District, was built in 1956. The railway has a miniature train running between two stations "Beijing" and "Harbin" and is managed by primary school children.

2. Recreation

Ice Lantern Festival

Celebrated every year on January 5, this festival embraces a range of activities featuring ice and snow. The most famous of all the events is the Ice Lantern Festival in which competitors design large-scale ice sculptures modelled on a wide variety of subjects. Once finished, the sight of the sculptures illuminated from the inside by coloured lights is breathtaking.

Summer Concert

The summer concert which has been held in July every year since 1961 provides a golden opportunity for professionals and amateurs, from home and abroad, to perform. The concert has become part of the city's tradition.

Winter Sports

One has a variety of winter sports to choose from: ice-hockey, acrobatic skating, speed skating, skiing, sleighing and swimming. A well equipped 100,000 square-metre Winter Sports Training Centre



1. Show-time for winter swimmers
2. Southern flavour in a northern place – enjoying the dishes of Hunan
3. Russian goods on sale





situated in Dazhi Street, west of Nangang District is an ideal place to flex your muscles. Its facilities include a spacious ice skating rink, a gymnasium, a swimming pool and a club house that can cater for and accommodate 404 people.

Horse Riding

In ancient times, the area surrounding Harbin was once inhabited by nomadic tribes. Today, you can hire a horse and enjoy the freedom of galloping across the vast grassland lying to the north-west of the city.

FOR YOUR REFERENCE

Useful telephone numbers

Fire.....119 Police.....110 Municipal Ambulance.....120 Weather.....121

Climate

Month	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Av. temp. (°C)	-19	-15	-5	6	14	19	23	21	14	6	-6	-16

Transport

Air: Harbin Airport is located 33 kilometres west of the city proper. Domestic routes serve major cities such as Beijing, Dalian, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenyang, and Xi'an. Within Heilongjiang Province, Heihe, Jiamusi and Mudanjiang can also be reached by air.

Train: The modern railway station forms the city's transportation hub connecting Harbin with other major cities both within and outside Heilongjiang Province. More than 80 trains arrive and depart everyday.

Bus & Tram: A transport network of 8 tram lines and 17 bus lines serves approximately 1000 stops within the city. There are 24 bus lines spanning from the city centre to the suburbs and outlying districts. The network of 34 long distance bus lines connect 20 cities and counties and Jilin City in Jilin Province.

Ferry: More than 100 motor boats and about 1,000 Sampans cross the Songhua River dotted with more than 20 piers.

Accommodation

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Photos by Xie Guanghui Article by Winston Yau

1. Russian bread, fresh from the bakery
2. Herbs that grow in Northeast China

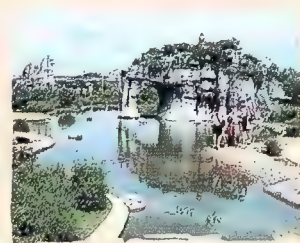
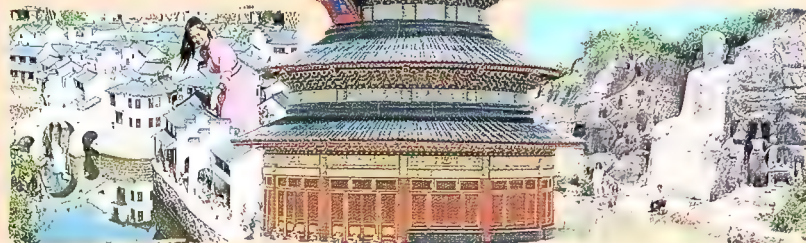
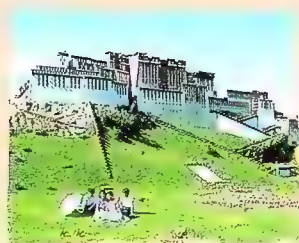


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At this place, the cloth pennants
are hung.

Studying Buddhism at the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau

– The Larong Pancavidya Institute in Sêrtar, Sichuan

Photos & Article by Xue Huake

The county town of Sêrtar in Sichuan Province is located at 3,800 metres above sea level at the edge of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. This typical highland county town has become known far and wide mainly because of its Buddhist institute.

The Larong Pancavidya Institute received its name from the great Living Buddha Panchen in 1987. It was previously a 100-year-old lamasery belonging to the Red Hat Buddhist Sect. The lamasery became a formal institute for the study of Buddhism in 1985. With the passage of time the institute developed very quickly, and at its height the number of students reached over 7,000.

Five Years on Tantrism

At present the students studying the Tantrism in this Buddhist institute are not only Tibetans hailing from the several regions inhabited by the Tibetan ethnic group, but are also people of other ethnic groups coming from 13 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions such as Beijing, Inner Mongolia, Jilin, Shanxi and Shandong. Among the students are 1,000 lamas and 700 nuns. Apart from free accommodation and subsidies for living expenses, the students also receive a small amount of money given by donators for their daily chanting of scriptures.

The students' dormitories are mostly individual log cabins lying on mountain slopes. They are built by the students

themselves with their own money, or with the help of their family members and fellow students. As being completed within a short time, these log cabins are very simple and crude. When the owner leaves the institute, he or she would sell or give the cabin to new students. In daily life the students look after themselves. They eat mainly *zanba* – made from roasted barley flour, usually without vegetables and meat.

Although the institute does not have a time limit for graduation, it usually takes a student five years to complete his or her study of Tantrism. The environment is very conducive to studying as the institute is set in a mountain valley three kilometres away from the highway, with no villages or towns in the vicinity. Completely sheltered from the temptations of the outside world, it is a very good setting in which the students can study

The institute accepts students of all ages. Even an aged monk may become a new student.



with one mind. Then, when a student thinks he has attained a certain level and feels confident in his studies, he applies to the institute to take his examination.

Presided over personally by the president of the institute, the examination is attended by all the monks. The student must answer all questions put to him or her by any of the monks. Afterwards, he or she needs to sit a written examination and also go through

A new scripture-chanting hall to be completed soon.

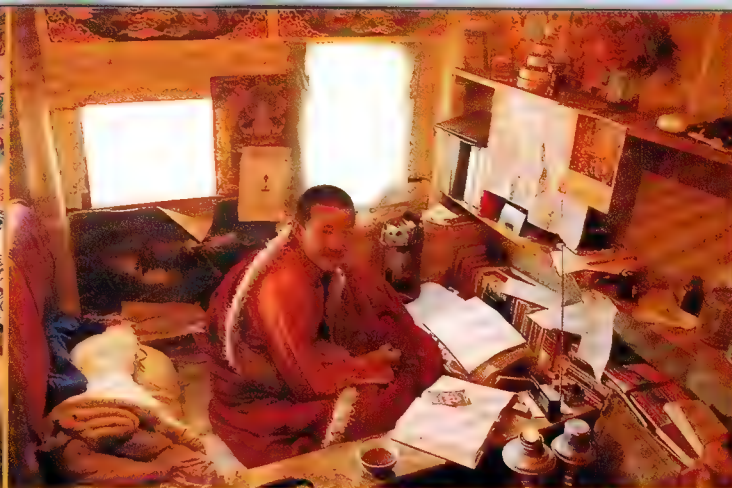


The entrance to the Larong Pancavidya Institute.





Lamas learning to paint at the institute.



Li Jia, a student from Beijing who has been ordained to *bhikṣu*, teaches others English while studying Buddhism at the institute.



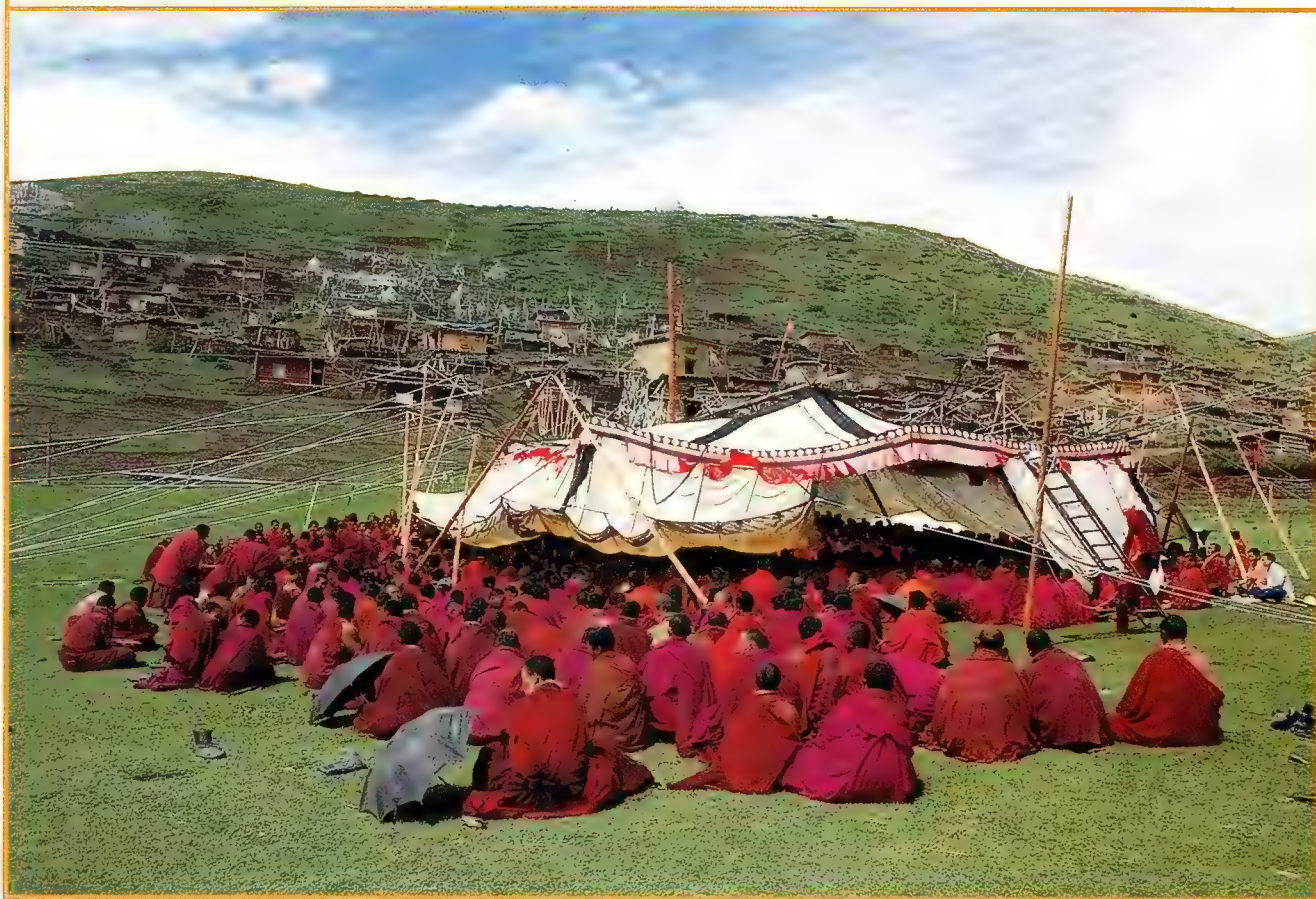
some tests on moral culture. The student must have strictly obeyed all religious disciplines during the course of his study, be kind-hearted and have good moral qualities. Only after all these aspects have been appraised and are deemed to be up to standard, can the student earn the title of "Master". Then, he or she is presented with a

certificate signed by the president and given a religious hat symbolising the authority of the "Master". With this title, he can either continue to stay on at the institute, either continuing his studies or teaching as a volunteer, or choose to move on to other places to teach, chant scriptures or practise Buddhist activities.

The Best School Run by Local Tibetans

The institute has about 50 masters. The curricula include almost all the elements of Tibetan culture: phonology, poetry and geography; Buddhism and Buddhist studies are the obligatory courses; Chinese, English and Mongolian are the elective courses. Medicine sciences and arts are also taught in

Students listen to a lecture given on the Buddhist scriptures on the grassland.





Tashi (centre) and his students

the institute. If a student is illiterate or has received very little schooling, he or she must first learn how to read and write in Tibetan. All courses are free of charge.

A non-government institute, this Buddhist school is run by the local people. It has become renowned for its size and quality of tuition throughout the regions inhabited by Tibetans. This is mainly due to the efforts of its president, Jinme Pumcuo, a living Buddha of great attainment in the teachings of Buddhism. He has achieved a good command of the theories of all sects of Tibetan Buddhism, and is able to answer any type of question in the religious field. He often lectures in schools and institutes in other provinces and regions, including the higher Buddhist academy in Beijing. It is said that many of his views on Buddhism are novel and unique, and his name is included in the world *Who's Who*.

A Typical Scene of the Grassland

Every year, beginning from the first day of the first month of the Tibetan calendar (about the same time as Chinese New Year), a three-day celebration is held in Seda. More than 10,000 people from the surrounding areas, including 3,000 monks, come to participate in the jubilant activities of horse racing, opera performance and other traditional Tibetan shows.

Not far from the county town beautiful grasslands stretch far into the distance to meet undulating mountain slopes and majestic mountain peaks. Visitors to the

Buddhist institute will be enchanted by the remote grassland.

In summer time Sêrtar is often at the mercy of changeable weather unique to the highland. Dark clouds suddenly gather at dusk and bring a down pour of rain, but the rainstorms pass quickly. The sky soon clears, and a colourful rainbow appears on the horizon. Sometimes two or three rainbows appear at the same time. The whole scene can only be described as "very enchanting, indeed."

Translated by Xiong Zhenru



Location Map of Sêrtar, Sichuan



The fully-adorned female Master Dainom Lhamo is ready for a grand Buddhist ceremony.

A GALLOP UP MT. GONGGA

Photos & Article by Michael Woodhead



The Author

Was I dreaming or was it real? I was standing before a mediaeval monastery 15,000 feet up the mighty Gongga Mountain in Sichuan

Province. It must be one of the most isolated places in the world, and what a place it is! The nearest road is four days ride away on horseback, and the valley is completely cut off from the outside world during the winter months by snow-bound mountain passes and fickle weather. The only visitors are the local Tibetans from the nearby hamlet of Tsemi at the bottom of the valley.

Gateway to Tibet

On a cool September morning, at the hot springs of Yulin Village, just outside Kangding (the traditional gateway to Tibet), the local Tibetans laughed when I told them I wanted to hike to Gongga Monastery. Enthusiastic at first, my spirits were soon crushed when I saw the immensity of the mountain ranges ahead of me. I am not a mountaineer, nor even a particularly athletic hiker which is probably what lay behind my decision to make the journey to Gongga Monastery on horseback. No sooner said than done. I recruited a local Tibetan man, Gele, and his fittest pair of horses to transport me and my pack to this legendary place.

I hadn't told Gele that I'd never ridden a horse before, but he probably guessed right away as I swayed nervously in the saddle. My horse was skittish, terrified of being struck by the red tether I held in my hand, and it constantly lurched forward, threatening to unseat me. But as the day wore on and we ascended further up the valley, my confidence increased to the point where I felt like a veteran cowboy.

Camping on the Jiazi Pass

Nightfall approached as we neared the Jiazi Pass, and I asked Gele where we would be staying for the night, being worried because we hadn't seen any sign of human habitation since leaving Yulin that morning. A few moments later he pointed to a black dot across the valley, and I heard the frantic barking of dogs.

The black shape turned out to be a weather-beaten tent of rough

canvas, the home belonging to a family of yak herders who were grazing their animals on this pasture during the summer months. They welcomed us into their primitive but cosy dwelling and cooked us a fine meal of noodles which we devoured around the hearth. Then, the oldest son produced a cassette player and played a few Chinese karaoke favourites for our late-evening entertainment.

The night held one more surprise for me. The flap of the tent opened and the baby yak calves were ushered into the tent – "It's going to be a cold night," said the head of the family. It sure was, and I was glad to have my thick down sleeping bag.

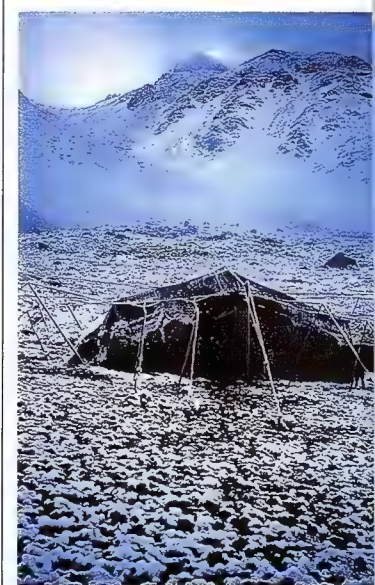
White Mountains

When I emerged from the tent the next morning the landscape was transformed into a gleaming white panorama of mountain ridges. It had snowed overnight and the air was bright and crisp. The route up to the top of the Jiazi Pass was clear, and I jumped up and down, half in excitement, half in cold.

After a warming breakfast our kind hosts waved us off towards the pass and beyond, to our next goal of the Yulongsi Valley. In the saddle again, with bells clanging, we made tortuous progress across the snowy plateau like two tiny ants across this vast white landscape. The scenery was magnificent: on either side of us was an array of serrated peaks under a sharp blue sky; behind us were the twin peaks of Hui Haizi and to our left appeared the sharp pyramid cone of Jiazi Feng. Amazing! Who would believe that such a mountain wilderness existed barely three days away from Chengdu, one of the most densely populated parts of China!

Caught in a Blizzard

Riding was infinitely better than hiking at these high altitudes of over 15,000 feet, however, I should have known



Yak herders' tent on the Jiazi Pass

better than to congratulate myself too early. As we started our long descent towards Yulongsi grasslands, the weather suddenly changed. A wall of dark cloud appeared and pursued us down the valley, eventually enveloping us in a blizzard that made my horse panic and throw me down, then bolt off with my bags. Fortunately, the storm soon abated and we were able to recapture the horse and its valuable load.

The rest of the day we continued our downward crawl to Yulongsi, an alpine farming community spread across the rolling pastures in solid stone-built houses that, from a distance, reminded me of my native Yorkshire Dales.

The bare interiors of the Tibetan houses were a testament to craftsmanship in wood, though they contained surprisingly little in the way of furniture. By the flicker of a single candle we sat around the fireplace on hard cushions and ate an evening meal of delicious fried potatoes and rice. The Tibetan children smiled, pulled at my hair and I wondered who was the more exotic in this situation – them or me?

Tsemi Wonderland

The next day the weather stayed clear and pleasant all the way to the top of the Tsemi Pass – the last barrier between us and Mt. Gongga. As we climbed higher the sun scorched and cracked my face and lips into a painful state while my guide Gele sang his Tibetan songs with greater gusto. And suddenly, as our poor horses heaved us up those last few steps over the stones to the summit of the pass, the mighty Gongga came into view in all its height.

We were lucky to get a glimpse of the peak because Mt. Gongga is usually cloaked in veils of clouds. Just like previous travellers, my whoops of delight echoed off the rock walls of the surrounding peaks.

From here on we would be in the isolated realm of the Gongga Mountain, being cut off even from the remote valleys of Yulongsi. As we descended into the Buchu Valley it was as if we had entered the private garden of the mountain gods. The steep trail zigzagged down until we were surrounded by rhododendrons and oaks, and then the distant rooftops of Tsemi hamlet came into sight. A faint plume of smoke emerged from a chimney and the people of Tsemi came out to watch our arrival, smiling and waving at the strange foreigner.



The impressive mountain ranges

Magic Forest

I almost didn't make it. Perhaps it was altitude sickness or the lack of calories in the dried food I had taken with me, but on the morning of the fourth day, with only a few more hours to go, I could not go on. I felt terrible and could barely sit on the horse without feeling like I was going to faint at any moment. Fearing for my health, I told my guide Gele to take me back to Yulongsi, but he would not hear of it.

"You have come all this way from over the seas, it is my duty to see you make it these last few kilometres," he said, and forced me to drink several cups of butter tea. A couple of hours later, feeling much better, I remounted the horse. The trail passed through a magical birch forest, a sacred pilgrimage route festooned with little shrines and *mani* stones, and I felt the atmosphere of the great mountain exerting itself on me.

Time seemed to stand still and our anticipation grew tighter with every step as we rounded one corner after another on the trail, expecting to see the monastery.

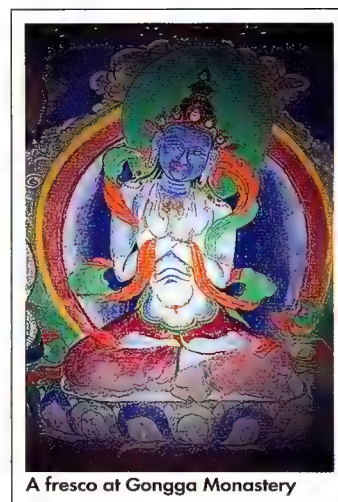
There at Last

When I saw it, the Gongga Monastery was just as I had imagined, just like the pictures taken 60 years ago. A tiny white lamastery perched above the glacier stream that ran down from the western face of Gongga Mountain. We dismounted and approached on foot to knock at the heavy wooden door. No reply. We called out but there was nobody at home. How strange!

Outside again, peering up the valley towards the clouds enshrouding Gongga, a scarlet-clad figure emerged from the undergrowth of brushwood. It was a lama of the monastery, who invited us into his scullery for a cup of tea. He explained that he lived there alone as caretaker during the winter, and taught the novice monks who visited here during the summer. He believed he was the luckiest man in the world to be able to live in this most peaceful and beautiful spot – alone with his prayers and his frugal lifestyle.

We stayed for two wondrous days, exploring the individual prayer halls and their multi-colour frescoes of the Buddhist deities.

At night the rain hammered down and the mountain gods sent thunderbolts crashing around the valley. As I lay in my sleeping bag on the kitchen floor, it finally dawned on me that Gongga Monastery was a real place.



A fresco at Gongga Monastery

Sea World, Nanjing

Visitors to a new park in Nanjing, capital of Jiangsu Province, can take a voyage to the bottom of the sea to discover the magical world of 9,000 sea creatures including 300 species of fish and other exotic sea life. The 31,000 square metre park features an underwater tunnel made of glass which transports visitors to the underwater world.

Great Wall Tales

Liu Wenyuan's *Tales of the Great Wall*, published in English by the Foreign Languages Press, is considered a good guide book for foreign readers. Most tourists visiting Beijing plan to climb the Great Wall and there is a saying "He who hasn't been to the Great Wall is not a true man," which shows the profound impact it has had on the minds of some.

This book not only surveys the history and construction of the Wall, but includes informative and interesting legendary tales and items on cultural artefacts, as well as discussions on the three great eras of its construction during the Qin, Han and Ming dynasties. It also gives detailed explanations of the functions of various facilities and the Wall's communication, defence and drainage systems.

New Telephone Numbers: Tianjin and Chongqing

Tianjin and Chongqing telephone numbers have changed from 7 digits to 8 digits. For Tianjin add a "2" to the current telephone number, while in Chongqing add a "6". The move has made the cities two of the only eight cities in the world to have eight-digit telephone numbers. It also marks an important stage in the development of China's telecommunications.

More Air Travellers

China will experience the world's fastest air travel growth over the next 20 years, forecasts the top aircraft producer Boeing Commercial Airline Group. The air traffic in China is expected to grow 8.7 per cent annually in the next two decades, according to Boeing's 1997 edition of "Current Market Outlook". Air travel within the country is predicted to grow 10.3 per cent every year with international traffic to and from China rising 6 per cent a year.

Huge Coal Deposit in Xi'an

A mining area in northern Shaanxi Province reports finding a coal deposit of 12 billion tons under a tract of land totalling 610 square kilometres. Recent prospecting determined that the Yushen mining area in the Zhuluoji coal field has a coal bed 15 to 25 metres thick. Yushen is located on the boundary of the Zhuluoji coal field, and is adjacent to the famous Shenfu mining area near Xi'an.

Dalian Dock Given Green Light

China's largest shipyard in Dalian, a coastal city in Northeast China's Liaoning Province, has passed state appraisal. The world's third largest shipbuilder, China can now catch up with Japan and South Korea. The shipyard has already proved its reliability by building 12 major vessels since its operation in 1995. As the country's top marine engineering site, the Dalian Shipyard will build this year 1.1 million DWT, or half the vessels planned for construction by the China State Shipbuilding Corp. The dock is 370 metres long, 80 metres wide and 13 metres high. The US\$33 million-dock is considered a milestone for China's shipbuilding industry.

Shanghai Expressway to Open

The city's fourth expressway, from suburban Songjiang County to Fengjing, Jinshan County, is scheduled to open next year. The four-lane, 27.6-kilometre highway with a speed limit of 110 kilometres per hour will connect with the 20-kilometre Xinzhuang-Songjiang expressway. Both will become part of the Shanghai-Hangzhou expressway currently under construction.

The 151-kilometre Shanghai-Hangzhou expressway is one of the country's 12 key highway projects. Once completed, it will connect with the 145-kilometre Hangzhou-Ningbo expressway.

Shanghai transfers 10 million tons of goods from Zhejiang Province to other parts of the country or abroad each year. Journeys between Shanghai and Hangzhou are expected to be shortened to one and a half hours.

New Air Route

Air China has opened a new air route linking Beijing, Hong Kong and London to mark the return of sovereignty of Hong Kong to China. Flights will operate twice a week: Monday, Beijing-London-Hong Kong-Beijing; Tuesday, Beijing-Hong Kong-London-Beijing. The route will be serviced by Boeing 747-400 aeroplanes.

Liaoning Lottery

Liaoning Province is selling lottery tickets to collect funds for local public services. Since 1987, the province has sold 750 million yuan (US\$90 million) worth of tickets, and a total of 220 million yuan (US\$26.5 million) has been collected for social welfare funds. The money has been used to aid local residents in financial difficulty and to establish more public welfare facilities such as rehabilitation centres and training schools for the disabled.

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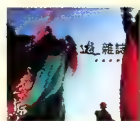
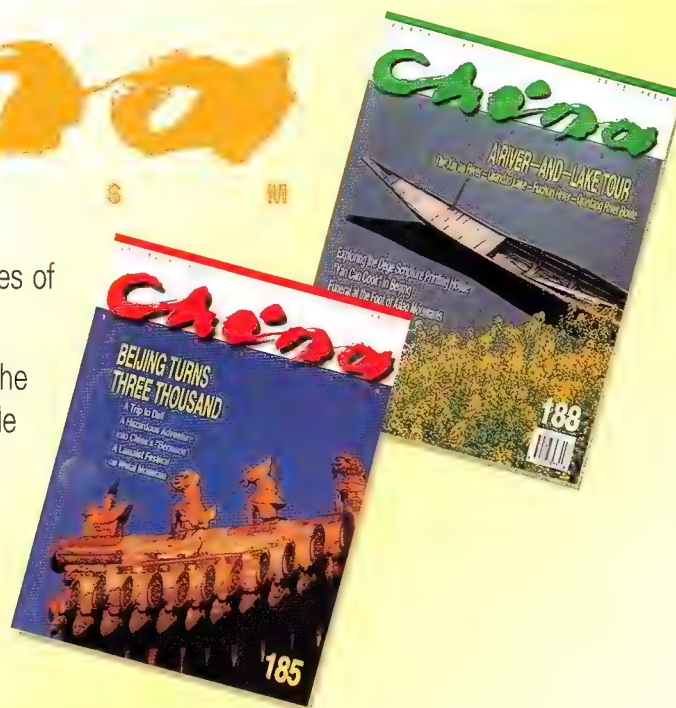
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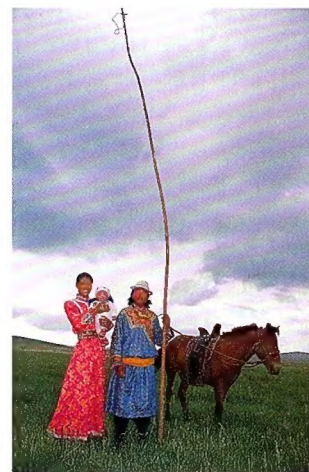
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Did you know that Inner Mongolia is mainly formed by **SIX GRASSLANDS**? We take a relaxed, carefree journey through the 2,000



Zhang Mingli

kilometres in this vast area. In another article, four painters from



Shan Xiaogang

southern China hire a jeep and, overcoming all kinds of difficulties, they finally arrive at Mount Qomolangma in Tibet.

In Sichuan, on the Chengdu

LONGQUANYI where



Zhu Lin

Plain, there is a place called every spring when the peach

orchards are in full bloom, travellers find themselves too intoxicated to leave. Meanwhile, even one's dreams

become poetical when visiting the picturesque **"PAINTERS'**

VILLAGE" in eastern Liaoning. Returning to Sichuan Province we visit



Shan Xiaogang



Wang Mao

the **YI PEOPLE**, one of China's ethnic minorities, who not only have the reputation of being good singers and dancers, but also celebrate

their festivals in a unique and colourful manner.



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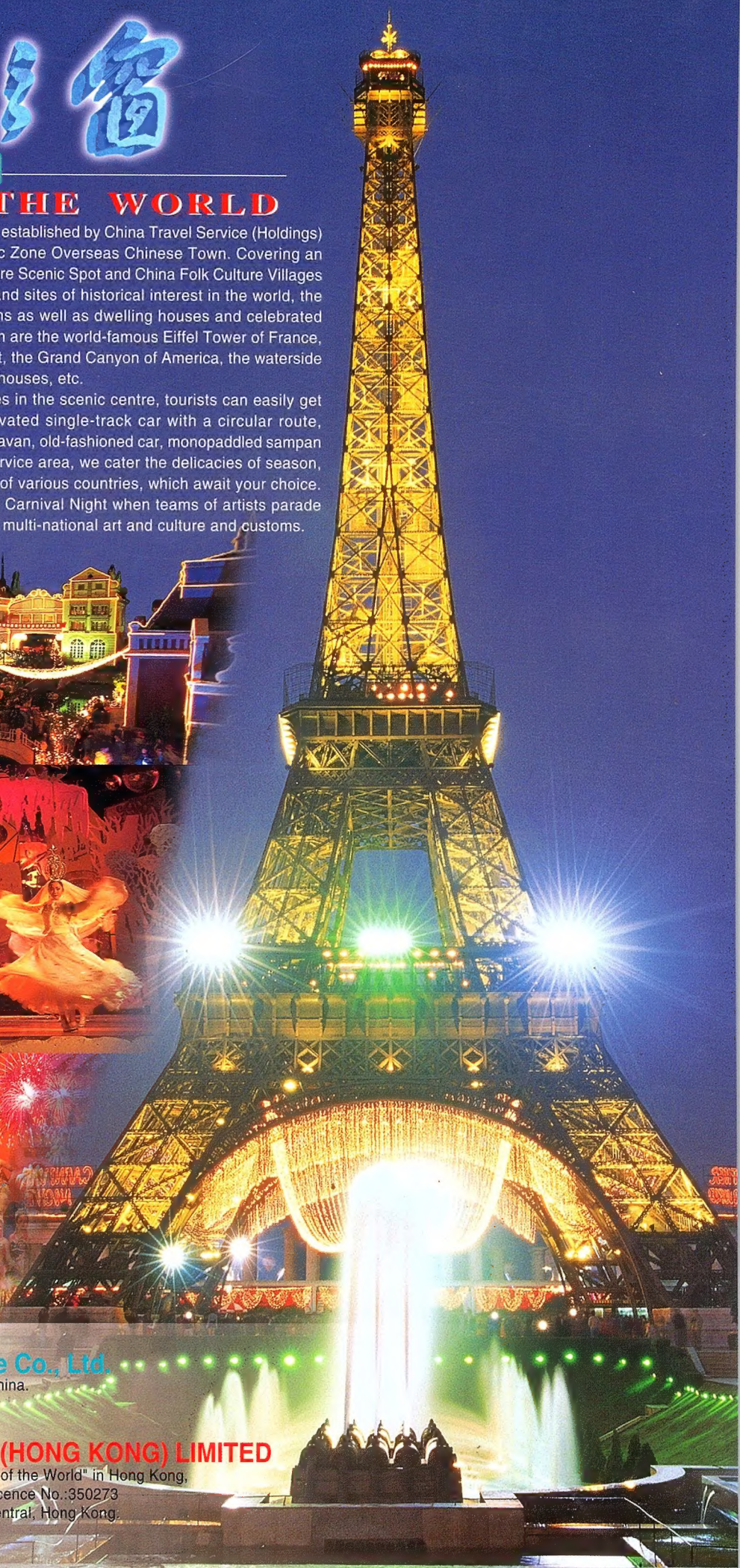


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